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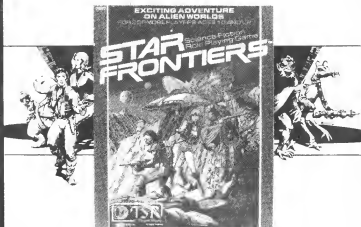
**Frederik Pohl's
"Where the Heechee
Feared to Go"**



**Alan Dean Foster
Dozois, Bain, & Swanwick
Algis Budrys on JEDI**

edited by George Schner

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by Hugo Gernsback**

Cover by **Richard Loehle**
for "Palaces of the Mighty"

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OPINION

by Robert Silverberg

It was a stifling September night in Baltimore and the Hugo awards were being handed out again at the World Science Fiction Convention. And once again I sat listening to the names of the nominees and trying to guess the winners, as I had done at every single Hugo ceremony since the first one in Philadelphia thirty years before.

It's impossible to have attended that many Hugo events without getting a little cynical about the whole process. The awards, after all, aren't awarded by a panel of experts. Anyone who has bought membership in the convention is eligible to vote. Many of the voters are brand-new science-fiction enthusiasts to whom everything they read is equally wonderful — Heinlein, McCaffrey, Spinrad, Varley, Ellison, Anthony — all dazzling, all terrific. For them, voting amounts almost to a random process. Then there are those who have read only a handful of the nominees (or none at all) and vote for people who they think deserve to win, or for those who are most likely to win (everyone likes to vote for a winner) or simply for candidates they once met and feel a personal connection with. And then there are those — well, you get the idea. Winning a Hugo is fun, losing one can be devastating, but either way it's folly to think that the decision of the electorate has a great deal to do with the absolute merit of one's most recent work.

That is nowhere more evident than in the categories that reward general achievement rather than the best specific book or story of a given year.

Consider the Best Professional Artist category, for example. There aren't that many well-known illustrators in the field, and the same names turn up on the ballot year after year. Michael Whelan was this year's winner. He won last year, too. Turns out he won in 1981 and 1980 also — four years in a row. Now, Whelan is a splendid artist, no question about it. But is he *that* good? Did no one else do Hugo-quality illustration in the past four years? Or are people voting for Whelan out of habit, out of conditioned reflex, out of a sense that it gives you a warm cuddly feeling to vote for a winner? It's instructive to look at the past history of that category. Kelly Freas was the 1955 winner — and went on to win three more years in succession. When the voters finally noticed that Ed Emshwiller was also doing some pretty fair work with the brush, he won four out of the next five. Then it was Jack Gaughan's turn to take home Hugos for three years. But Kelly Freas began winning again in 1972 and this time he was the winner five years running.

In the Best Professional Editor category, Ed Ferman won again. Ho-hum: Ed won last year too, and also in 1981. He runs a fine magazine, of

course. But there are others. Ben Bova used to be an outstanding editor too, which may be why he won five years in a row beginning in 1973, and again in 1979, with time out for an award to George Scithers. (Who won again in 1980.) Nor was Ferman any stranger to Hugos, having picked up four in succession between 1969 and 1972, after Fred Pohl had collected three in a row for his magazine *If*.

You see what I'm demonstrating: these awards are marked by lengthy winning streaks.

Best Fan Writer, for example. Richard Geis has picked that one up seven times. He has six Hugos more for editing the Best Amateur Magazine. (If I'm not mistaken, Geis's thirteen Hugos is the most anyone has ever won.) Charles Brown of *Locus* is another who comes up to the dais almost every year: the Hugo he won for Best Amateur Magazine this year was his eighth, and the fourth in a row.

I don't mean to argue that Messrs. Whelan, Ferman, Freas, Bova, Geis, and Brown were undeserving of their awards. Over long periods of time they have demonstrated exemplary skill at their work. I do wonder, though, whether the voters are really honoring their current achievements so much as they are their past Hugo-winning history. Kelly Freas is a grand master of the brush, no doubt about it — but for two or three years back there he was working almost exclusively in other fields, while such artists as Emshwiller, Gaughan, and John Schoenherr were doing brilliant work in science fiction and going unrewarded. Brown's *Locus* and Geis's *Science Fiction Review* are valuable and superbly edited magazines admirably sustained over many decades, but has no one else in fandom achieved

anything worth a trophy for all these years? Or, to descend to a bit of special pleading: Ben Bova did a fine job when he was editing *Analog*; but when he won his 1973 Hugo for Best Professional Editor, nothing that he published that year was deemed worthy of an award. Two of the three short-fiction Hugos that year went to stories that had appeared in an anthology called *New Dimensions*, edited by one R. Silverberg; but Silverberg, who was also nominated for Best Professional Editor, got no Hugo himself. (The winner in the third category was a story I had *rejected*. If I'd had the good sense to have bought it, I'd have had a clean sweep of the winners — but Bova would still have been the year's official Best Professional Editor.)

Conditioned-reflex voting, which I think is endemic in the categories of general achievement, is less of a problem in those that single out particular works of honor. It exists there too — certain writers get voted for, it is widely suspected, simply because they are well known — but the superiority of a specific piece of fiction in a given year is often clear-cut; and, if it is, how can one fail to reward its author even if he or she has won Hugos for the past few years? Ursula Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness*, say, or Poul Anderson's "Queen of Air and Darkness," or Heinlein's *Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, or George R. R. Martin's "Sandkings" — what would the previous award history of those authors have mattered, when stories as powerful as those were on the current ballot?

But Best Artist, Best Professional Editor, and the like — those are such vaguely defined categories that it seems to be well-nigh impossible to demonstrate consistent overwhelming pre-eminence. And it is, I believe,

damaging both to the credibility of the awards and to the souls of the defeated nominees to have the same few people carrying off the trophies year after year.

What can be done? The suggestion is sometimes made that perennial winners disqualify themselves after having won a certain number of Hugos, and this has occasionally been done, at least in some of the fan categories. But that is a solution, I think, that cheapens the award. Who wants to take home a Hugo inscribed *Best Fan Writer Except Richard E. Geis*, or *Best Professional Editor Not Counting Edward L. Ferman*?

There is another solution — one that was voiced by Ben Bova after he had won the Best Professional Editor award, somewhat to his embarrassment, for the fourth or fifth consecutive year. That is for the voters to

pause for a little thought before marking their ballots — to consider each candidate with care, to examine the quality of that candidate's recent accomplishments, rather than hastily and blindly voting to give the award to last year's champ. Which is not a bad idea, may I add, when dealing with any sort of ballot.

A counsel of perfection, I'm afraid, that will meet the usual fate. And it will not amaze me to see the usual winners come forth to claim their usual Hugos next year in Los Angeles; and I will, as usual, applaud them with my usual fervor. They do, after all, deserve their awards. But there are others, let me suggest, who may be just as deserving, and who are forced to remain in the shadows year after year at science fiction's most glittering event.



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BOOK REVIEWS

by Robert Coulson

Talbot Mundy: Messenger of Destiny

compiled by Donald M. Grant
Donald M. Grant, Publisher, \$20.00
(hardcover)

Talbot Mundy's stories of adventure in strange places began appearing in 1911 and have been reprinted at intervals ever since. Few of them are fantasy; in those days, adventures set in India were regarded in the same light as those set on Mars. I suppose that a few of his novels, such as *Tros of Samothrace*, could be considered "swords and sorcery," though this one was actually written as an historical novel of the time of the Caesars; but most are not what we think of today as fantasy. Readers of the time, however, ranked them along with the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. Rider Haggard, Jules Verne, and H.G. Wells.

This bio-bibliography includes a short autobiography of Mundy originally published in 1919, reminiscences of his last wife, a biography by Peter Beresford Ellis, appreciations of his work by Darrell Crombie and Fritz Leiber, and an exceptionally thorough bibliography. There are photos of Mundy and his family, and an excellent dust-jacket by Ned Dameron. I found it fascinating to compare the autobiography with Ellis's well-researched biography; apparently what Mundy wrote about himself was as much fiction as any of his stories.

Mundy is the sort of individual who is fascinating to read about, though I'm just as happy that I didn't know him personally. The book is highly entertaining, and recommended.

Gusliar Wonders

by Kirill Buychev
Macmillan, \$16.95 (hardcover)

The latest offering in Macmillan's line of Russian science fiction. This is a collection of short stories, about half of which take place in the backwoods village of Great Gusliar. Most are interesting and amusing, though they have a certain antiquated air to US readers. Some of the problem may be with the translation, but I think most of it is because they have no general references to politics, history, or sociology in anything but local contexts. Great Gusliar — and the other settings — are totally cut off from the world at large. This type of setting can produce excellent fiction, as people like Manly Wade Wellman and Zenna Henderson have proved, and Buychev's best efforts are as good as US writers have done, but some of the material seems a trifle quaint. The stories are straightforward, and many of the gimmicks are amusing and original. The robot trees, the aliens who land on a highway and hastily try to repair it before anyone notices, the love which could move matchboxes if not mountains, the alien who is very nearly eaten as a

squid, all form the basis of fascinating tales. On the whole, it's not exactly classic literature, but it's worth your while to read it.

The Coelura

by Anne McCaffrey
Underwood-Miller, \$11.95 (hardcover)

Considering the number of Anne McCaffrey fans I keep running into, I assume there are a lot of them around, and most will want this book. They deserve a warning, though: it's really a short novelette packaged in hard covers, it's not one of McCaffrey's best, and it has nothing to do with Pern. The idea of a fabulous cloth of secret manufacture is sound enough; doubters can go read a history of silk. Plot and characters, however, leave something to be desired, and the dialog sometimes gets downright silly. Still, it's readable enough; even relatively low-grade McCaffrey is probably above-average for the field as a whole. Plot concerns a romance worthy of Harlequin Books, and trade treaties and intrigues for control of the fabulous cloth.

Minus Ten and Counting

edited by Teri Lee, Jordin Kare & Catherine Cook
Off Centaur Publications,
\$6.00 (paperback)

Subtitled "Songs of the Space Age," this is a 48-page, large-size songbook, containing words and music to twenty-three space songs by assorted authors; Diana Gallagher and Jordin Kare contribute the most titles. There are illustrations by Kelly Freas, Don Simpson, William Warren, Jr. and Wendy Rose, and lovely full-color covers showing a shuttle launch and a rocket ready to go. Since I'm a non-singer, I'm more interested in tapes than songbooks, but this seems ideal for anyone looking for pro-space songs

to use as propaganda or sing in the shower. (I'm waiting for the accompanying tape, which is still in production as this is written.) I miss seeing Joe Haldeman's "It Was Sad When That Colony Came Down" in here, but then that's not exactly a *pro-space* song. This is a book for boosters—rocket or human.

The Union Club Mysteries

by Isaac Asimov
Doubleday, \$13.95 (hardcover)

A collection of short mystery stories originally published in *Gallery*. They are quite short; all thirty of them take up just over one hundred eighty pages. They are neat little puzzle stories; I didn't guess the solution to a single one (which doesn't mean a lot because I almost never do). The unifying theme is Griswold, the man who always has the answer, whatever the problem. Worthwhile if you enjoy trying to solve puzzles or even if you marvel at how an author can work out so many tricky little gimmicks; my enjoyment was of the latter sort. Forget it if you're looking for brilliant characterization or social significance; otherwise it's quite interesting.

The Tree of Swords and Jewels

by C. J. Cherryh
DAW, \$2.95 (paperback)

A fantasy of the time when the Sidhe have almost gone, and an ancient evil has returned to plague both humanity and Faery. The complications arise in the alliances and rivalries typical of medieval society, where loyal noblemen are necessary to support the royal power, ambitious ones are a threat to that power, and not all kings are able to tell one from the other. Plus, of course, the general distrust of the populace of Faery and of anyone associated with it. The society depicted is

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By
Frederik Pohl

PLB DATE FEB 1984
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complete, complicated, realistic, and somehow didn't interest me all that much. Technically it's an interesting job; possibly my vague dislike is caused by the fact that the book is too close to real life for me. Certainly anyone who has liked Cherryh's earlier books should like this one. (And if you haven't read Cherryh's earlier books, where have you been lately? Go rectify your error.)

The Sword is Forged

by Evangeline Walton

Timescape, \$15.95 (hardcover)

Essentially the story of Theseus and Antiope, Queen of the Amazons. It's written in a much livelier style than the usual, somewhat ponderous prose of Walton's books. I've heard Walton fans disparage it, but I liked it better than I did most of her books. The theme is the problems of a liberated woman in a repressive world; that's common enough these days, but Walton portrays both sides to better effect than most writers manage. Of course it's a tragedy; not only are the Amazons obviously doomed from the start, but we know of the later life of Theseus, and Antiope isn't around then. The reasons why it's a tragedy make interesting reading and probably provide a few morals for our time.

The Crucible of Time

by John Brunner

Del Rey, \$12.95 (hardcover)

Depicting the totally alien society has become a popular pastime of authors lately. Brunner's aliens are quite thoroughly different from humanity; they're a sort of arboreal mollusc, somewhat reminiscent of a tree-dwelling squid, and their differences from us in body and perceptions make differences in their language and thoughts. These differences, of course,

are not too great for the reader's understanding, but provide a satisfactory alienness that goes beyond mere description.

The book is divided into seven sections; each section covers a vital period in the race's advances in knowledge. The reader begins to notice after a while, though, that the sections mostly describe dramatic disasters and the real scientific advances occur offstage between sections, as the people try to cope with their problems. The book begins with the race discovering crude telescopic lenses, and ends with it building spaceships to reach the stars. On the way, individuals turn into legends, and their statements become ritual, as new individuals go beyond their findings. It's a quite fascinating book; another candidate for next year's Hugo award.

The Robots of Dawn

by Isaac Asimov

Doubleday, \$15.95 (hardcover)

Asimov seems to be going back to his roots lately; this is the third novel in his robot/detective series that includes *The Caves of Steel* (1954) and *The Naked Sun* (1957). Lije Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw are called on once more, to solve the murder of a robot on the planet Aurora. The detection is interesting but actually takes up a small part of the book. Lije meets an old girl-friend, there is much conjecture on the nature of robots, and some conjectures on psychohistory, as Asimov starts to connect this series with *Foundation*. The discussions of robots are quite interesting early in the book; later on, once we've gone through it all one or more times, they begin to look like padding. Plot is the standard one of detective looking for clues, questioning suspects, and finding only complications until the solu-

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OUT OF THE SUN



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BEN BOVA



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"People have said that I am the science fiction author who has had the greatest effect on the literary world, but I believe that by far the science fiction author who will have the greatest effect on the scientific world and the world as a whole is Ben Bova. I have nothing but praise for Mr. Bova and how he unlike any other can bridge the gap between the scientific world and the ordinary person that no one else has ever accomplished."

—Ray Bradbury

tion appears. It seemed a bit long but was enjoyable, and overall it works much better than the recent extension of the *FOUNDATION* series did.

The Star Wars Intergalactic Passport

Designed and illustrated by
Charles R. Bjorklund
Ballantine, \$2.50 (paperback)

Ballantine has been pouring out *Star Wars*-related material to coincide with the release of *Return of the Jedi*. There have been the usual trade and massmarket paperback novelizations of the movie, the pb on the making of the movie, a sketchbook, a very nice portfolio of paintings, *My Jedi Journal* with blank pages that can be used as a diary — and the passport, which is both amusing and original. That's a hard combination to find in movie-related material. The design is quite similar to a genuine passport — though, as the publicity release says, "slightly larger than life." Most of the pages are blank, with places for attaching a passport photo (not supplied, naturally) and visa stamps. Two sets of the latter are included. There are port-of-entry seals for such places as Mos Eisley, Tatooine, Alderaan, Hutt Palace, a permit to board the Millennium Falcon and others; thirteen different places in all. These must be cut out and pasted in; they're not self-sticking. This seemed pretty cheap until I considered the problems bookstores would have if the passports contained removable gummed labels. There's even a page of medical information, warning the traveler about insect bites on Dagobah and similar problems. Amusing for an adult and probably fascinating for a child.

The Fantastic Art of Rowena
Pocket Books, \$8.95 (paperback)

An 8½" × 11" book, with 26 reproductions of Rowena Morrill's paintings. There's also a foreword by Theodore Sturgeon, an introduction by Boris Vallejo, and a photo of the artist which suggests that she may paint some of those sexy females while looking in the mirror. While some of her swords-and-sorcery covers are somewhat silly, that's a problem of the genre, not of the artist. She can do and has done quite excellent work which doesn't require an improbably sleek female being Menaced, and some of it is in here. And while her s&s covers are sometimes improbable, they do a magnificent job of getting the newsstand browser to stop in his tracks and pick up the book. An excellent collection.

The Steps of the Sun

by Walter Tevis
Doubleday, \$14.95 (hardcover)

Essentially a psychological study of a likeable but unhappy tycoon. Since psychology is more of an art than a science, it lends itself well to literary art, and Tevis is an expert at creating complex characters. Ben Belson has pretty much the same problems as the cast of "Dallas," but they're presented much more entertainingly. Along the way we also discover Belson's world: energy-poor, with the few oil and uranium reserves locked up by the military, and slowly grinding to a halt. The U.S. is limping along on coal and wood power and has become a second-class nation. The Chinese still have nuclear power and are the world leaders, Japan is economically but not militarily important, Scotland has gone Marxist, Russia has been defeated by China in war. An initial surge into space has been officially halted for lack of nuclear power; Belson, with his billions and his semi-

Marxist philosophy, manages to restart it. Basically, though, he goes through the book looking for a mother, and eventually finds an improbable one. The science didn't convince me; the characters did. It's not the sort of book or the sort of characters that I like, at all — but I liked this one.

Staying Alive

by Norman Spinrad

Donning, \$5.95 (paperback)

This is more for the beginning author who has had a story or two published than it is for the rank novice. It's basically a guide to finances: not how to sell a book but how to realize the maximum income from it. It's been noticed by the more intelligent science-fiction fans that would-be authors talk about prose styles and imagery and the artist's soul, while working authors compare notes on literary agents, bitch at contracts, and worry about reprints in Patagonia. This book is for the working author, and most of Spinrad's advice is eminently sensible. The way he states it may raise a few hackles; after all, this is a man who gets most of his publicity from being "controversial." But don't let that stop you from considering the advice. There is some material here for the writer still trying to make a first sale, but mostly it's for perusal after that sale has been made.

Fritz Leiber

by Tom Staicar

Frederick Ungar, \$6.95 (paperback), \$11.95 (hardcover)

A long critique of Leiber's writing, with some material about the man himself. Staicar emphasizes the variety of Leiber's material, which is notable mostly because he has won awards in several different fields. Most of the old pulp-magazine writers produced equal

variety, but they didn't win any awards with their output. Staicar goes into the plots of Leiber's stories somewhat more than I think necessary, but his conclusions, while modest, are quite solidly based. A dependable if not very exciting reference work.

Christine

by Stephen King

Donald M. Grant, \$65.00 (hardcover)

This is the limited, boxed edition, illustrated by Stephen Gervais and autographed by both illustrator and author. There's growing business in these "instant collector's items" that I'm not sure that I approve of — books are to be read, not stored away as investments. Grant does provide a good example of book manufacturing for those people interested. Those not interested can get the regular hardcover, or go see the movie which is supposed to be out before this review. King's plot is simple enough: teenager buys junk car, which turns out to have supernatural powers of its own. As usual in King books, the beginning is a perfectly marvelous depiction of the lead characters; by the time you're well into the book you know Arnie Cunningham, his buddy Dennis Guilder, his academic-liberal parents, the garage owner Will Darnell, and assorted teenage toughs, as well as you did the people you grew up with. Also as usual with King books, it goes on too long. Perhaps that's the secret of mass sales; keep going over every point until the duller reader understands it. I began to lose interest about three quarters of the way through. It's not particularly horrifying to a fantasy fan, but it's an excellent character study, if that grabs you.

Realms of Fantasy

by Malcolm Edwards & Robert

Holdstock

Doubleday, \$17.95 (hardcover)

An odd-sized 10" x 11" book, with a good many full-color double-page illustrations. The text, describing the most popular places in fantasy — Middle-earth, Mars, Hyperborea, Gene Wolfe's Urth, Earthsea, and others — is surprisingly good. (Surprising because usually the text in illustrated books doesn't amount to much.) Unfortunately the artwork doesn't equal it. None of it is bad art, and some of it is excellent, but about half of it is bad illustrating. I trust the reader sees the difference; a painting can be beautiful on its own terms without having the slightest relevance to what the author was writing about. This is British Modern Fantasy style; lots of bright colors and poster effects, which is why the illustration of Bradbury's Mars is the worst in the book. Bradbury's work does not lend itself to garish art. None of the Mars paintings are good. Fred Ludekens — a cowboy-story artist for the *Saturday Evening Post* — did a better Mars 35 years ago than anyone in here manages. The art for the Mines of Moria is also somehow lacking in substance. On the good side, Chris Foss's Atlantis is gorgeous, Mark Harrison's Melniboné is quite good (Moorcock's work does lend itself to poster styles), Ian Miller has caught the spirit of Gormenghast, and Bill Donahue's depiction of *Lost Horizon* is good. Donahue's version of *The Lost World* seems to owe more to Indiana Jones than to Professor Challenger, but there's some feeling in it. This one is worth taking a look at; you might like the art better than I do.

The Night Shapes

by James Blish

Avon, \$2.50 (paperback)

Avon is reprinting the Blish novels

as a matched set. This is one of my own favorites; it's a straight-faced parody of all African and jungle adventure stories, particularly those of Burroughs and Haggard. There's no overt humor in the book, but the ideas are all jungle-writing clichés with a wry twist to them; the great White Hunter, the Hidden Valley, the White Queen of the Jungle, the Enormous Treasure, the Animal Companion of the Hero, the Strange Menace, and so on. I might point out that when the book first appeared, almost nobody agreed with me that it was a parody — but one of the few who did was the author, who wrote to point out several clichés that I'd overlooked. If you've read enough of the originals, the book is hilarious. I suppose if you're not familiar with the jungle tales of Burroughs and Haggard and Kipling, this might seem to be a somewhat silly adventure novel, but it's really much more.

The Sea of the Ravens

by Harold Lamb

Donald M. Grant, \$15.00 (hardcover)

This is the second volume in the trilogy beginning with *Durandal*. Sir Hugh, the wandering Crusader, in his efforts to get home without being killed by one Moslem or another along the way, becomes entangled with Subotai and the advance force of the Mongol expansion. Plot is the fairly standard historical adventure of the time; the story first appeared in 1927. In all the stories of the type, the hero somehow managed to meet every noted historical personage of his era; Lamb's work is exotic because his historical characters are not the commonly encountered ones of the western world. It's a good adventure — better than most middle books of trilogies — and has very solid historical founda-

tions, as well as a lot of sword-swinging. Artwork by George Barr and Alicia Austin enhances the book; their styles are quite suited to depictions of the barbarous Orient.

The Neverending Story

by Michael Ende

Translated by Ralph Manheim

Doubleday, \$15.95 (hardcover)

Translator listed because why should the author take all the blame? The publisher claims that this novel has been "The #1 bestseller in Germany for three years" and a bestseller in Spain, Italy, and Japan. Frankly, I can't see why. It's a long and slightly tedious fairy-tale. In intent it may be akin to C. S. Lewis's Narnia books, but Lewis did a far superior job. Basically, we have here a slightly backward and somewhat obnoxious boy who steals a fairy-tale book and reads it while hiding out from school and his father. Eventually, through the magic of the book, he becomes a character in the story instead of an observer, helps the good guys win and presumably learns something about himself in the process, and possibly goes on to become an upstanding citizen. (If I've misinterpreted any of this, my apologies, but it was so dull that I skimmed a lot.) Normally I wouldn't have reviewed it, but I suspect that it's going to be

enthused over by mainstream critics who are befuddled by science fiction but can follow a fairy tale, and I felt a warning was in order. The author does show a lot of imagination; unfortunately he has no ability to plot at all. The story moves from one alleged wonder to the next, like a tourist in Greece. Since anything at all can happen, nothing is particularly exciting.

Science/Fiction Collections: Fantasy, Supernatural and Weird Tales

edited by Hal W. Hall

The Haworth Press, \$29.95
(hardcover)

Most academic volumes are overpriced; this rather slim little volume is more outrageously priced than usual. For your money you get, basically, a bunch of librarians and private collectors bragging about their collections. Fred Lerner has an article on cataloguing and classification that might be useful, Robert Weinberg lists some of the specialty sf publishers, David Aylward and Robert Hadji list a few book dealers and review mags, and the rest of the book seems to have no practical use. The information in the hundred and fifty pages of other articles could have been given just as well in ten pages of checklist. Avoid.

by Frank Catalano

Science fiction is a field full of "givens" — things you accept just because you read science fiction. It makes science-fiction readers as much a select group with their own secret language as doctors, lawyers, chimney sweeps and the like. Perhaps even more so than the aforementioned

groups; science-fiction readers don't go to school to learn the code words, they just read.

If you don't believe me, just go to a doctor, lawyer, and maybe even chimney sweep and throw the phrases "FTL drive," "hyperspace travel," "first contact," and "generation ship"

at them. Odds are you'll get baffled looks, unless of course they actually happen to read the stuff.

Conventions such as FTL drives and the like do have a tendency to deteriorate into clichés if badly handled over the years. Look what's happened to time travel, notably the time travel paradox story, a.k.a. The Great Dead Grandfather Paradox Story. Unless written very well, and from a very different angle, I'd be willing to bet most editors in the field wouldn't touch such a story. Right, George? [Right. — GHS]

That's not to say non-SF magazines wouldn't grab such a story immediately. They don't *know* — or at least, most of their readership doesn't — that it's been done before. Again, there's nothing wrong here if it's really well done. But very likely those stories come across to the SF reader like so much rechewed bubble gum. And that, good or bad, is one of the prices paid for SF's current popularity in the mass media.

The Lazarus Effect

by Frank Herbert & Bill Ransom

Putnam: \$15.95 (cloth)

Earthseed

by Pamela Sargent

Harper & Row: \$6.95

(trade paperback)

Both *The Lazarus Effect* and *Earthseed* use something that might be considered a mini-convention of SF — a starship named Ship — and do entirely different things with it.

The Lazarus Effect is a sequel to *The Jesus Incident*, which Herbert and Ransom penned back in 1979. *Incident* was a complex novel, in which Ship, a starship carrying thousands of human beings and animals and plants in hibernation (yes, with “hy”) winds up in orbit around the

planet Pandora. Ship, thinking itself something of a deity, demands humans figure out how they will Worship. Eventually, it abandons many of the people on Pandora, after humans successfully kill off Pandora's only intelligence — the kelp in its seas.

In *The Lazarus Effect*, hundreds of years have passed. After land masses disappeared following the kelp's destruction, humanity split into the high-tech, “normal” Mermen who live undersea, and the Islanders, who live on floating cities and rely mostly on organic technologies. *Effect* is no less complex than *Incident*. A renegade group of Mermen want to wipe out the Islanders and seize the hibernation tanks still in orbit; other Mermen are building artificial landmasses; and to top it all off, the kelp is coming back.

Herbert and Ransom have thought the world and society out well, and the characterizations are solid on all sides. Neither Mermen nor islanders wear black or white hats — they all have their own seemingly good motivations. As you might expect, it is slow going at first as the various complex story lines are developed.

Nonetheless, it's a good follow-up that at least equals the readability of *The Jesus Incident*, and it's a thoughtful piece of work to boot.

A Ship of another temperament is the focus of Sargent's *Earthseed*. This Ship, too, has spent over a hundred years with its stored human cargo, looking for a planet to colonize. But there similarities end. First off, the Herbert and Ransom work is decidedly an adult novel, with graphic scenes of carnage and sexuality. The Sargent is being marketed as a juvenile. Sargent's Ship is also different: it's a benign dictator, fully believing — perhaps to a fault — in the programming of its builders.

Ship here is taking genetic material of Earth's best and brightest to the stars, and opens with the first of the young people getting ready to colonize through a series of tests against the environment and against each other. There are no real twists or surprises in the novel, save one in which the young people find they aren't as alone as they'd first thought.

This is the type of thing I could see myself reading in junior high school — there are mentions of sex, but nothing explicit. A mildly enjoyable read for the adult in me, and probably good reading for its target age group.

Broken Symmetries

by Paul Preuss

Timescape: \$15.95 (cloth)

I may gush too much about Preuss's *Broken Symmetries* because, as I have mentioned before in these pages, so little good hard SF is being written these days. But what Gregory Benford did for tachyons in *Timescape*, Paul Preuss has done for quarks in *Broken Symmetries*.

A novel of near-future physics, *Broken Symmetries* takes place at a joint U.S.-Japanese particle accelerator in Hawaii. A scientific team has discovered the I-particle, which contains the inside quark. But a new theoretical physicist on the staff has doubts about the stability of the new particle, even though his doubts are contrary to the experimental evidence gathered by the team leader, a former weapons researcher.

It's not what you'd call a thriller; rather, it unfolds more like a parlor detective puzzle. That changes in the final fifth of the book when the problem finally gels and tension springs out. Unlike a lot of idea-oriented hard SF, *Broken Symmetries* has real people as characters, along with real emo-

tional needs and all that human stuff. Should you not care for the technical explanations, they can easily be skipped without losing the plot somewhere along the way.

Broken Symmetries is a winner — good hard SF, melded into a good novel.

San Diego Lightfoot Sue and other stories

by Tom Reamy

Ace: \$2.95 (paper)

The copyright on this one reads 1979, but don't let that fool you — this is the first large-scale commercial publication of this collection. If you liked Reamy's work and didn't see this in its original small-press edition, it's worth picking up.

If you're not familiar with him, Tom Reamy was a writer who died at the age of 42 of a heart attack while, ironically, working on a story at his typewriter. He left two books — the novel *Blind Voices* and this collection. It's a collection of 11 stories that can best be described as hard-hitting, gut-wrenching fantasy similar in impact to some of Harlan Ellison's best. Ellison, in fact, wrote the introduction to the collection.

The stories appeared from 1974 to 1979, and checking the Satisfaction Index (number of memorable pages/total number of pages) Reamy's collection rates an impressive 76%. Two of the eleven didn't make the grade, one being almost painfully amateurish, and the other a dull screenplay treatment. But the rest are all powerful, in varying degrees. Some you may never forget.

I don't go in for praising-the-dead-author, but this is genuinely a good collection of entertaining, solid stories — the title tale even won a Nebula. There will be those who find the

stories too strong and stark, or too downbeat. But if you enjoy a good, fantastic story, written with care and impact, you're likely to find a lot of them here.

The Unteleported Man

by Philip K. Dick

Berkley: \$2.75 (paper)

Ubik

by Philip K. Dick

DAW: \$2.50 (paper)

While Tom Reamy was taken before he could reach full maturity as a writer, Philip K. Dick died just as he was beginning to receive recognition outside of the SF field for his wildly imaginative paperback originals. Dick's writing is inspired, lunatic, deep, moving, and entertaining — sometimes all on the same page. Fitting, then, that a lot of his better works are again seeing print.

In the case of *The Unteleported Man*, the novel isn't just seeing print, it's being restored. Berkley has put 30,000 words back into the 1966 Dick classic for the first complete version of the novel, and returned the original ending.

Like many of Dick's works, it deals in a tangential way with scattered effects of World War II. Rachmael ben Applebaum is trying to salvage his father's space trucking firm, which was driven into ruin by the discovery of the Telpor effect. The company that controls Telpor is using its ability to transport matter nearly instantaneously and apparently one-way to send Earth colonists 18 light-years to the Earth-like planet Fomalhaut IX. All the information coming back from the average Earthpeople who paid to go is gushingly wonderful — and second-hand. So ben Applebaum, against the wishes of the Telpor firm and the New-Whole-Germany-controlled United

Nations, decides to take his last remaining ship to travel to the planet and see what's *really* going on.

Not having the original at hand for comparison, I can't tell you what the ending and 30,000 words really do for the book. But I can tell you it appears to be a worthwhile addition. There is a rather lengthy description of an LSD trip, and the novel threatens to get out of Dick's control and jump off the edge of rationality. But just in time for the ending Dick grabs the reins again to bring it to a conclusion that's almost a cliché in SF writing these days — though I can't see another way out.

Right along with World War II spinoffs, the nature of reality was a favorite topic of Dick's. One of the best novels I've ever read with that as a focus is Dick's *Ubik*, also in print again. DAW has undertaken a rather ambitious campaign of putting nine of Dick's novels back in print on a regular schedule; *Ubik* is the seventh. Having first read *Ubik* over a decade ago (it came out in 1969), it was nice to find it still was as good as I remembered, and I even picked up more of it the second time through.

Without getting into too much lengthy detail, suffice it to say Dick was a master of offbeat, everything-but-the-kitchen-sink SF: fun to read, almost maniacal in its energy, but with something deeper as well. It's good to have Dick back, even if only in the worlds he created.

Pet Sematary

by Stephen King

Doubleday: \$15.95 (cloth)

Let me get this right out in front: I don't deal with horror well. I'm one of those people who went to see the movie version of King's *Carrie* and was up until three A.M. drinking coffee in a restaurant. I don't read horror

novels before I go to bed. Damnifino why I write the stuff.

But I am drawn to Stephen King primarily for his well-drawn characters and settings, especially in his fantasy and SF-tinged novels *The Stand* and *The Dead Zone*. *Pet Sematary* has none of the fantasy/SF leanings, but what it does have is a good dose of horror.

Like much of King's work, *Pet Sematary* is set in Maine, where a young doctor and his family have settled in the small town of Ludlow. They find behind their house a well-maintained, unofficial pet cemetery (misspelled "pet sematary" on the sign; thus the title) where kids have buried their animals for years. But slowly, the family finds out there is a much older cemetery — with a much less kind history — even further out back.

Not much a reviewer says any more can influence the sales of a King novel. This one is no exception. But for the record, and if you already aren't a diehard King fan who buys everything he writes, this is a decent piece of horror writing. It gets off to a familiar, almost hackneyed start (cute young family settling in), but by the

second half has you looking over your shoulder.

Pet Sematary is not great King, but good King. If a mark of a good horror novel is how many vivid mental pictures you remember days later, *Pet Sematary* has a good tally.

The Seren Cenacles

by Warren Norwood & Ralph Mylius
Bantam: \$2.95 (paper)

The Seren Cenacles is worth mentioning only in light of the publicity being generated for it. Norwood is coming off the success of his *THE WINDHOVER TAPES* series, and unfortunately, while that effort may work, this one doesn't. It starts out promisingly enough as a pulp-style adventure with a solid puzzle to solve. But near the end it degenerates into a confusing morass of mixed motives and unconvincing explanations. It's not worth the effort, or the building-up it's getting.

Incidentally, *The Seren Cenacles* also violates McIntyre's Law. Coined by Vonda N. McIntyre, it states, "Never call a book anything that is impossible to pronounce or embarrassing to say." Because then nobody will talk about, and no one will buy it. ☹



DISCUSSIONS

by The Readers

Dear George,

Your July issue is a perfect example of what I would be doing with *Amazing* if I were Editor. First, get a cover that is visually appealing. January's cover might have been nostalgic to a few readers, but it was visually dull. As a person with a B.B.A., permit me to say a few words from a marketing standpoint. As far as mass-market fiction goes today, science fiction sells the hottest. Despite the pseudo-intellectual's continual snipping at Hollywood, this phenomenon has everything to do with films like *Star Wars*, and now *Return of the Jedi*. In short, a space-action cover is the most appealing kind of cover you could use. More Thomas Kidd! Marketing isn't such a nasty thing. What would you buy from among all the books and magazines today?!

And an inside novelette by Frederik Pohl! As the dopers say, "This is good stuff. . . ." Mr. Pohl is truly one of the greats in this field, certainly a master of plot and wit. But I fear some people can't appreciate this. Recently it has become cliché to knock the greats. "Just take the same old stuff, add new extrapolation, and presto!" So they say. (Read the book reviews in all the magazines.) I personally enjoy the incomparable, polished work of such greats as Bradbury, Asimov, Clarke, Anderson, Pohl, et al. I think that their stories are entertaining, fascinat-

ing, and just damn fun to read! I like Reunite. But do you know why it has become popular to knock Reunite? Because some people want others to know that they are "connoisseurs." Well, they can just go to Hell.

It is also refreshing to know that you still treat newer writers with respect, and give many manuscripts your personal attention. (Who knows this more than I?) I see no reason why *Amazing* cannot swiftly become one among "the main four," both among writers and among readers.

And now a word concerning "Knight of Shallows," by Rand B. Lee. This story was certainly "a fine story," and also quite fascinating. I would just like to point out, though, that the concept is almost identical to *The Entropy Effect*, by Vonda N. McIntyre (1981) and more than similar in certain respects to Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*. Nevertheless, I believe the story stands well on its own as "original." Somewhat. But Mr. Lee should avoid words such as "masturbation" and "urinate." And there are far too many "shits." It's shit-this, and shit-that. It's not offensive so much as it is *distracting*. Why are we, as readers, interested in whether or not Roger-Doger pees? If there are some legitimate things the writer is trying to convey here, why not bring that out in more subtle ways? Even a pulp magazine has taste.

Keep improving the magazine, and let's see some more attractive covers. Let's see those circulation figures go up! How about 20,000 this year in paid circulation? And suggestion: put some pizzazz into the interior artwork. I'd like to see some pen-and-ink, like what the late Roy G. Krenkel used to do. One reason people drop subscriptions is because they conclude, "I might as well drop; I don't even read the damn things anymore." Well, if you would add a little attractive artwork, as opposed to illustration, people might feel *invited* to read the stories. In my opinion, many of the interior illustrations in *Amazing* do not look inviting at all. (Sorry, George). But listen, even *U.S. News and World Report* eventually had to start having color pictures. And just how inviting does the *Wall Street Journal* appear?

Sincerely,
Michael G. Adkisson
Arlington TX

Dear George,

I have just finished the May issue of *Amazing*, and excepting "Against Infinity," I read it with great pleasure.

However, while reading "Aquila: the Final Conflict," I couldn't help wondering why Somtow Sucharitkul made the assassinated Julius Caesar speak Latin. I don't see how the time Criminal's manipulating with the technological level could make the leading Romans stop speaking Greek. And since it is not explained, why add the extra confusion?

This is not to criticize the story as such, which was truly excellent!

Sincerely,
SGT Urban Fredriksson
Swedish Medical Company,
UNIFIL
Naqoura, Lebanon

Our in-house Roman-history expert points out that while any high-class Roman of Caesar's time would have to be fluent in Greek and might regard this as a mark of culture, the major writers and orators of the era still used Latin (Livy and Cicero, for example). It was not until much later, as the Roman world became less Italian, that people like Marcus Aurelius and Julian the Apostate wrote in Greek. And we doubt that they ever used Greek exclusively. Caesar was probably too busy being stabbed to be pretentious.

— George Scithers

George Scithers:

In the July Discussions Chris DeVito complained that *Amazing* is just like Asimov's. It is AMAZINGLY like Asimov's as edited by George Scithers — is this, necessarily, bad? A good job is a good job no matter who you do it for. Having enjoyed that magazine then I have no problem with *Amazing* now. Shawna McCarthy is taking that other publication off in her own direction so, speaking for myself, I will find pleasure in maintaining both subscriptions. I must admit, though, that I find Sucharitkul a waste of space. But, then, *Amazing* is not being published for me alone.

This issue was very good (took less than two days to absorb it cover to cover). "Knight of Shallows" was the freshest approach to this subject since Piers Anthony's "In The Barn." It was the definite highpoint of this issue. I even enjoyed "The Creation of The Khan" (which, to me, was the worst of this issue): ergo, the whole offering meets with extreme approval. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
Timothy Orr
Detroit MI

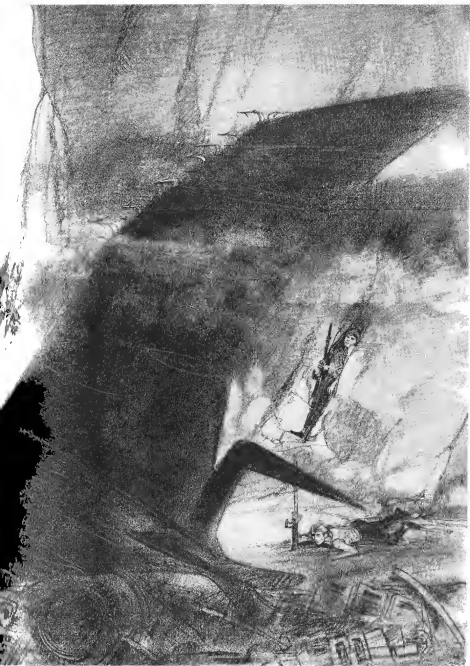


PALACES OF THE MIGHTY

by Robert Morrell, Jr.

art: Richard Loehle





The jump was the same as always. Grim-faced technicians leaned over consoles while the computer struggled through the n-dimensional analysis that would squirt them across the Galaxy. The actual moment of the jump was anticlimactic, for Lar could sense nothing.

The landing was unique, as all landings were. The shuttle orbited once before the retro thumped Lar in the back. Lar roused himself from a half-sleep, and stretched his tall, dark, muscular frame over the crash couch. Outside his portal, Tesa's enigmatic continent appeared on the horizon. Even at this distance Lar could tell that it was something new in the way of land masses. A large oval of brown, soiless stone, the continent appeared to Lar as a large flat rock.

The pilot of the shuttle woke from his nap to monkey-check the trajectory. Lar had not spoken much to the man, and there seemed to be some unexplained resentment in the air. Lar looked down on Tesa again. As they skimmed directly over the land mass, he saw another of the anomalies of the continent. The edges were raised.

Cleo Loho fea zi, Lar remembered, *the cliffs at the edge of the world*. There were no beaches on Tesa. Where the land met the misty ocean there were only sharp cliffs six to ten kilometers in height. The rock was a high rock, a high, flat plateau.

The first suggestion of Tesa's weak gravity pushed Lar into his couch. Outside, a dull orange glow appeared and grew to yellow brilliance. They were coming down the way man had from the beginning of space travel, butt first and on fire. After a time, the giant that held Lar released its grip. The pilot burped and watched as the computer guided the glide of the shuttle. The craft was barely vibrating now, since they were still high in the atmosphere. Slowly it took on the feel of an aircraft.

Below, the continent glared brown. Running all over the polished wood color were tiny dark lines. These were the canyons of Tesa, Lar's destination. Deep vertical fissures, they resembled cracks more than canyons.

"The rock is cracked," Lar said to the pilot, sure that it was not the first time that the comment had been made.

"Watch out for the bugs in the cracks," the pilot said distractedly.

Ah-ha, so that's it. Lar chuckled.

The native Tesans were as enigmatic as the world they lived on, and Lar was not surprised to find some of the Interworld crew hostile toward them. Tesans were descendants of a First Expansion religious colony, and their religion still held center in their culture. They expressed no great shock when the first re-expansion Interworld ship arrived. Through the millennia they had remembered what the stars were. That alone decreased the assumed superiority of the Interworlders.

Then they had turned down the eager offerings of the explorers from the stars. Can openers (and cans), hair dryers and microwave ovens were all sent back. The Tesans politely pointed out that their technology was sufficient to produce such items, but they saw little need for them. They were satisfied with what they had.

Rebuffed but not defeated, the Interworlders had sought another way of impressing the calm barbarians. Noting how Tesan communities seemed to "hide" in the caves halfway down the vertical faces of the canyons, the Interworld crew decided to show off their technological superiority by establishing their base on the horizontal stone atop the plateau. The Tesans had repressed their urge to laugh and sat back to watch.

The first things they saw were falling bodies, as workman after workman got caught in the high winds without a tether. Next, the Tesans watched as the Interworlders attempted a vertical pipeline to the bottom pools. It seemed that it seldom rained up top, and high winds interfered with the condensers. That project failed in hideously expensive ways. Finally a down-craft pilot discovered the variability of those high winds and destroyed an important cargo of hardware as well as himself. The Interworlders were forced to go begging.

The Tesans responded quickly and without gloating, which made it worse. They set the foolish offworlders up in a mid-down cave in a canyon near the northern ocean. The Tesans patiently explained that the shuttles could land in the thick but calm mists of the ocean. Then the cargoes could be lifted by a multistaged rope elevator. The Interworlders were thoroughly defeated, especially when the primitive system worked flawlessly.

Since that time the Tesans had kept their distance from the Interworld camp, occasionally giving tips to the starmen on how to survive in a vertical world, and sending gifts on their many holidays.

"Damn queer bugs, too," the pilot grunted as he watched the landing computer do its work. The Tesans, Lar mused, had done what no other people had ever done to the Interworld society: they had held their ground and won.

I think I'm going to like it here, Lar thought.

The Interworld base on Tesa was a gloomy place, but that may have been because it was raining. Lar was given indifferent treatment, which he expected since he was here to live with the Tesans, not the Interworlders. After a token visit to the officials and a quick shuffling of electronic papers, Lar was loaded on an airwhale and carted miles up the canyon. He saw nothing but clouds till the last minute. As he was dropped without ceremony on a wide, misty ledge, the clouds parted.

Lar was swept by a wave of vertigo. He stepped back with eyes closed,

and only after a few moments did he dare to crawl to the edge for a second look.

It was still a grey day, but clear air filled most of the upwind canyon. What clouds there were played havoc with Lar's depth perception. One glance could span ten kilometers or ten meters. Great ovals and spirals of cloud danced in the lower levels of the canyon. The upper canyon displayed the brown rock of Tesa, here and there glistening from recent rain.

The blimp that had brought him retreated downwind and then disappeared into thick cloud. Lar searched upwind for the Tesans who were to meet him here. After some squinting, he spotted three yellow dots weaving a complex path along the opposite wall of the canyon.

Lar had spent the last unit in intensive book study of Tesan society, its language, culture, and technology. He had not expected anything to surprise him; but as he knelt on the ledge watching the Tesans fly toward him, he felt a sense of awe. The canyon's scattered clouds illustrated the complex weather patterns present, but the Tesan flyers moved through the maze of air currents with an assurance Lar had not detected in the birds of any world.

The flyers resolved into yellow crescents. *The shape of airfishers*, Lar thought, making a mental note to pass that observation on to Lowry. Somewhat cynically, he reflected how she would probably twist it to make the Tesans look more primitive. Lar shook his head and sighed, *Sarah, Sarah, what has happened to you?* Meanwhile, the Tesans had turned their flyers and begun crossing the chasm. They moved in strange curves and dips, sometimes following each other, sometimes separating as if avoiding some invisible obstacle.

As they flew closer, Lar could make out the finer details of the craft. The crescent shape was bisected by a thick, tapered keel, containing, Lar knew, the little-used power pack and a small cargo hold. The pilot was strapped prone into an open nacelle beneath the keel. The arms were stretched out along the crossbar, hands grasping the controls for each wing. Feet and knees controlled the small tail assembly. The pilot's head protruded in front of the craft, making the whole thing look like an extension of the body. Tilting the head back to nudge the leading edge triggered the thruster. Lar had read that, by age twelve, most Tesans could fly just about anywhere without using an erg of fuel. The flyer was one of the marvels of Tesan technology that mystified Interworld sociologists. No hunting-and-gathering society could be so advanced, said all the modern theories. The Tesans ignored it all and kept on flying.

The three flyers were still considerably below Lar when they reached his side of the canyon. They seemed to jockey close together for a moment, stalling away from the cliff. Then in unison they turned to the left and moved forward as if stepping onto an elevator. The effect was the

same. The three flyers surged upward and in seconds were above Lar. Again in unison they peeled out of the updraft and crabbed toward him, perilously close to the canyon wall. When they were directly overhead, they each lowered a wing and dropped down in a half spiral that made Lar gasp. At the last second the pilots righted themselves, dropped their legs down from the controls, and stalled to a soundless landing. Lar shook his head and let his amazement show.

In contrast to the speed of their landing, the three Tesans took considerable time getting out of their flyers. They performed countless control tests, technical tests, inspections, and harness checks. Then they carefully anchored their craft to the rock. Lar saw that they all wore compact parachutes.

Finally one of the Tesans stepped forward towards Lar. He was tall and thin with long blond hair pulled into a bun at the back of his neck.

"I am Yoran," he said in accented Interworld.

Inwardly, Lar winced. This was the bitter schoolboy he had read about. The first Expedition had snatched him up and sent him to Kraline for a "civilized education." After three units, the Tesan had come back, disgusted with horizontal living and Interworld society. It was logical that the Tesans would send him, but it would make things more difficult.

"I am Lar Carscaddon," Lar replied, in what he hoped was unaccented Tesan. "I can speak your language if you wish." Lar had been through this scene many times. He was counting on his mastery of their language to make a good impression.

"What is it that you wished to speak to us about?" Yoran spoke Tesan, but made no comment upon it.

Lar sighed. "I am what we call the advance man for Lowry Expeditions, Inc. We produce the program 'Worlds Away' for the video circuits." Lar decided to gamble. "Perhaps you have viewed this program?"

Yoran nodded without expression.

"Then you know that we film scientific expeditions to other worlds, mostly studying the animals of those worlds. We would like to have an expedition on Tesa to film and study the airfisher."

The two other Tesans behind Yoran looked at each other in surprise.

"Why would you want to study the airfisher?" Yoran still betrayed no emotion.

"The airfisher is the largest known aerial carnivore. Its method of hooking and dragging its prey off cliffs was a legend from the first expansion."

"What exactly is it that *you* do?"

"We know that the natives of any world know much more than we about surviving on that world. I am sent ahead of the expedition to live with you, to learn at first hand your ways. When the expedition comes, I hire guides and coordinate their work."

Yoran seemed to smile, but Lar could not tell whether he was being sarcastic. "You want to live with us?"

"If it is possible, I would like to be one of your home."

"Home is a permanent kind of word, a rest-of-your-life word." Yoran paused, then made a decision. "But you could be a *Cointon-tra*, a 'working guest.' We will teach you how to live on Tesa, but we reserve the right to decide later whether to help your expedition, dependent on your behavior."

"I am empowered to make such a commitment."

"Good, let us begin your training. Trelan, you look about his size. Would you lend him your spare chute?"

Trelan seemed to consider for a moment. "The trip back is not a difficult one: yes, I will lend it."

"Thank you, Trelan." Lar bowed.

Trelan laughed and removed a very light-looking harness from his cargo hold. Yoran and Trelan helped Lar into it, showing him how to adjust the straps, and showing him where the pilot chute was tucked.

"Pull it out by grabbing the apex ring." Yoran said. "It will be inverted. Release it at an arm's length, and it will flip over, inflate, and pull the main chute off your butt."

Lar stretched experimentally. The compactly packed chute hung lightly at the base of his spine. The whole outfit felt no more uncomfortable than a heavy jacket.

"Okay," Yoran said suddenly, "jump off the cliff."

Lar looked to see if the man was serious. Yoran seemed nonchalant. "You learn to walk on other worlds, you learn to fall on Tesa. You'll never fly till you can use your chute. We'll fly down and pick you up in midair. Don't do a delay of more than fifteen seconds."

Lar admired the logic, but as he peered cautiously over the edge, his survival fear asserted itself. "What about air currents, and how do I stay stable in free fall?"

Behind him, Trelan laughed again. "I like him, Yoran; he's cautious. Those other fools would have gone before we strapped the chute on."

Yoran chuckled too. For the first time Lar detected potential friendship. "You did well. Spit over the edge."

After another hesitation, Lar spit.

"No, clear your throat, make it heavy."

Lar did. Together with Yoran and Trelan he watched the spittle fall out of sight, and listened to their comments on the wind patterns it traced.

"First rule of life of Tesa:" Yoran laughed, "trust only your own spit."

Minutes later, Lar found himself three meters from the edge, spread-eagled and falling. As the wind's rush slowly increased in his ears, he thought for the second time, *I think I'm going to like it here.*

The hurricane was born in the southern oceans. With a vast expanse of water to feed upon, the storm grew to gargantuan size, heightened, as is everything on Tesa, by the low gravity. Slowly, inexorably, it moved towards the lone continent. In the north, the Interworlders looked at satellite photos and appreciated their colder but calmer location.

When the storm hit the cliffs, it piled up and then tumbled over onto the high flat plateau. In the dry altitude the mangled storm quickly spent its strength. There were, however, four canyons that received the storm. Three faced south, directly into the storm. They channeled the winds like a raging river, with speeds over 400 kilos per hour. The fourth was a morning canyon, facing east, meeting the cliffs at an angle. The sheer pressure of the hurricane forced winds down the canyon, though at lower speeds. Overhead, the dying plateau winds passed with such force as to begin a whole-canyon rotor, twisting the storm winds into a giant corkscrew. Feeding on the unique temperature gradient of the morning canyon, the winds acquired a life of their own. They left the disturbances of the parent storm far behind and journeyed deep into the southern mazes.

The Tesans also watched the storm closely, mapping its progress with remote sensors. The southern mazes were largely uninhabited, but there were prospecting teams and other parties scattered throughout the area. When the storm twisted unexpectedly down one canyon, the Tesan weathermen radioed an iron search team from the Northyearn Community, led by Yoran Diedron. The meteorologists noted that the party had an Interworld member, a *Cointon-tra* who had joined them recently. They wondered what he would think of the storm.

"Is the storm threaded?" Lar could hear the concern in Yoran's voice.

"Yes." The radio said. "It has broken into two cells: the top is counter-clock, the bottom clock. The calm joint between is probably about 150 meters wide."

"Where's our nearest shelter?"

"Ahead, towards the storm. A small cave about fifteen echs away, at about point three on the right side. Better move fast or you won't make it."

Yoran thanked them and signed off. "You heard, let's move!"

The pilots fired their thrusters in noisy unison. The forward flyers spread out along the rock, looking for the fast air.

"I found a back-suck!" said a pilot.

"Pull in behind me, Lar: stick close to my tail." Again the worry edged Yoran's voice. Lar tried to comply with the Tesan's command, but he was having trouble finding the column of contrary air.

"Come on!"

"I'm trying!" But Lar knew it would not be enough. For the next three hours, he was always the last to find the proper current, and the first to

lose it. He fell further and further behind. Despite Lar's half-hearted urgings, Yoran held back to lead him.

The air grew rougher. Lar was near exhaustion fighting turbulence, and even the Tesan pilots were having trouble holding stable. Lar and Yoran lost sight of the others about the time that they first saw the storm.

The canyon, or so it appeared, simply ended in dark grey and black clouds. As they flew closer, the two cells became visible. The top cell jutted ahead of the bottom like a massive chin. The rotation of each cell seemed slow until Lar realized they were two kilometers away. Thin threads of cloud reached ahead of the storm like tentacles feeling the way.

"We've spotted the cave, Yoran. Can you still see us?"

"No."

There was silence for a time. Then the radio spoke again, with urgency.

"Look out, Crena!"

"The air's dropping like a stone here!"

"Flare!"

"Crena!"

"I'm in, broke my leg. Get in here, quick!"

More silence followed.

"Yoran, this is Leta. We're in, but I don't think you can make it. The storm's almost here already. Crena's flyer is wrecked and her shin is compounded. The rest of us didn't make it in much easier."

"Did any of you see any ledges on the way in?"

"I did!" Crena's voice was strained. "Couldn't tell how big, foot-hanger at worst, but it was an ech back and on the upper side of the calm joint. It's really in the joint, but it might be high enough to have winds to drive away the airfishers."

"If you get by them," another pilot said. "I saw two good-sized flocks as we came in."

After a pause, Yoran spoke calmly. "Okay, we'll give it a go. Tie yourselves down and we'll see you later."

"God's path."

"You too."

Lar struggled fitfully with a patch of turbulence. "I'm sorry, Yoran."

"Don't apologize till we're dead. Now follow me tight; we're going into the bottom cell and then pulling up through the joint. We'll have to dead-stall right over the ledge and drop out of our flyers."

"Can we stay there the whole storm?"

"Depends on how big the ledge is. I've got some spikes and rope in my cargo hold, I'll bring them with me and try to tie us down. Our biggest worry for now is those airfishers: they ride the storms out in the calm joints."

"What'll we do if we see any?"

"Stay out of their way."

The headwind suddenly stopped, and then reversed. The storm was drawing them in. Ahead, Lar could see Yoran reaching behind into his cargo hold. The Tesan flew with his feet while he wrapped the lengths of rope around his shoulders. Lar reached into his own hold and pulled out his pistol.

His flyer veered right. Lar stuffed the gun into his shirt and grabbed the controls again. It would be awkward to fire, he thought.

The sunlight winked out. Lar's eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness before him.

"We'll be diving into the downdrafts of the bottom cell, so use your thrusters, we'll need all the speed we can get to pull out of them." Yoran paused. "You ready?"

"I guess so."

"Edge over towards the wall a little bit, but be careful; the winds could shove you into it if you don't anticipate them. Okay, let's put our noses down."

They did. The wind's rush filled Lar's ears and sent a shudder through his flyer's wings. The light dwindled even further, till the color drained out of the images before him. The cliff by his right wingtip became a smooth blur as the bottom cell began pulling them down. Above them the joint was a dark, cloudless channel that went into the storm like a knife wound. Lightning flashed around the edges, revealing scores of dark shapes: the airfishers.

"Pull up — now! Climb for all you're worth!"

Lar followed. Unable to make sense of what his eyes could see of the storm, he concentrated only on Yoran's flyer. His exhausted limbs responded to the challenging winds without conscious thought.

Suddenly an enormous crescent of black skin and white teeth moved between the two flyers.

Lar spoke twenty-seven languages and the expletives of thirty more, but even so he was struck dumb. The creature was fifteen meters, wingtip to wingtip. White spikes, curved and serrated, lined its leading edge. The mouth opened and closed as the central joint bent and the wings flapped. Fortunately, Lar couldn't see the teeth.

"Yoran!"

The Tesan did not reply. Lar could see that the airfisher was closing on its prey. They were approaching the bottom of the top cell, where the updraft aided the larger wing surface of the airfisher. If Yoran were to turn, the monster would be on him instantly.

Lar released his right control and pulled out his gun. His flyer rolled slightly to the left, taking Yoran out of the line of fire. Lar aimed for the central joint and squeezed off two quick shots.

The airfisher's backside exploded in a dark fluid. The carnivore froze with its wings bent, then flipped on its back. The awful teeth flashed at

Lar. Then it was gone.

Yoran's flyer twisted and dropped back till it was only meters from Lar.

"Damn you!" Yoran shouted against the wind, his radio off. "Throw that gun away! Now!"

Lar dropped the pistol and grabbed the controls. Alarms were going off in his head. He had touched a taboo here. *Surely not against shooting airfishers?* Considering their precarious position, Lar did not ask questions.

"There's the ledge!" Lar shouted, almost before he realized what he had seen. It was small, only a wingspan long and a man-width deep. They were heading almost straight for it.

Yoran jumped forward and told Lar to hang back and watch. With a thrust pulse, Yoran pulled his flyer back to vertical. The craft rose on its tail and then stopped almost over the ledge. Yoran hit his quick-release and stepped out of his flyer as if he were entering a room for tea. His flyer fell away in a slow dive.

"Hurry!" Yoran shouted from the ledge. "The storm's almost here!" The words were drowned by the roar of the wind.

Lar banked towards the cliff wall and allowed the updraft to push him up. He tilted back and rose to vertical just as he had seen Yoran do. The flyer hung on its tail. He was two meters short.

"Back around, quick!" The Tesan sounded desperate.

Lar did a wingover and yanked a 360 to the left, diving to get below the ledge. Even so, as he pulled back to aim at the rock, he could see that he was going to overshoot this time. The storm was lifting him twice as fast. He was only halfway to the stall when he passed the ledge. Yoran was close enough to touch.

"Bank right!" Yoran shouted.

Lar did, and the maneuver sent his right wing into the cliff with a crunching noise. The flyer stopped and then the left wing began to drop.

"Release! Release!" Yoran was screaming now.

Again Lar obeyed. He pulled the central capewell just as he came face to face with the rock. He slid out of the flyer, dragging his hands against the stone, being careful not to push off.

His feet hit the ledge with a loud smack. Lar's knees buckled, and he tumbled backwards. He grabbed for the ledge, but found no purchase; he was falling. . . .

Suddenly his helmet smashed into the cliff, and Lar found himself stationary. He looked up and found Yoran, hanging over the ledge, holding Lar's ankle with one hand.

"May the Lord have mercy," Lar said, remembering what world he was on.

"He may," Yoran said. The Tesan pulled Lar to the ledge in one quick

motion. Lar lay on his stomach for a second assessing damage. He was bruised and scraped, but nothing was broken. He looked up to see that his flyer was still above them, pinned against the cliff by the high winds. As they watched, the clouds moved in and the wind began whipping them with a fury that mocked the previous breezes.

Yoran was driving spikes into the rock. "Let's tie ourselves down!" He handed Lar a rope, then spoke again, in a lower voice. "I don't know how you missed it, but *never, never* fire a gun from a flyer. It's our strictest law, and it is to be obeyed at any cost, including your life or mine."

"But why?"

"Look at our world! Do you see any wars? We have no place to march armies, so if we refuse to shoot from a flyer, we'll never shoot at one another. We can shoot from a ledge, to defend ourselves, but never from a flyer! It's an imperfect rule over imperfect people, but it works. You're not Tesan, so I'll tell you once. But I'll not tell you twice, and you'll either die or flee if you do it again. Understand?"

Lar nodded.

Above them, Lar's flyer was ripped from the cliff and disappeared with a tearing noise. Lar wedged himself tighter into the corner of the ledge. The rain began and he closed his eyes.

Lar stretched out gratefully before the fire. The Tesans had fed him well, impressed with the earnest day's work he had done. Lar had felt guilty about the flyers lost in the storm, and had pushed himself till even his offworld muscles had ached.

Lar felt doubly good about the work, for one damp and smelly day in a Tesan fishery had explained the advanced Tesan technology. *The key*, thought Lar, *is the canyon ecosystem*. Interworld scientists had mistakenly assumed that the rock-walled canyons were nearly barren of life, and then further projected that the Tesans would be forced to spend a large portion of their day just gathering enough food to feed themselves. They should not have had time to spare for such things as advanced flyers and radio nets.

However, only a few days on Tesa had shown Lar the rich variety of plant and animal life that inhabited the canyons. Free-floating hydrogen-filled plants rose to catch the sunlight during the day, then sank to the damp bottom pools at night. The plants were food to a number of ledge hoppers and gliding animals, which in turn fed higher carnivores, including the undisputed king of the food chain — the airfisher.

It was the canyons themselves, however, that made Tesan ecology so unique. Unlike horizontal worlds, where food and other biomass was scattered over large areas, and often spent long periods of time in slow, nonproductive cycles, Tesa's entire ecosystem was stacked on top of itself. Gravity pulled all organic matter down into the moist bottom

pools. There, the density of the aquatic ecology was practically beyond measurement, and food-gathering required a minute fraction of the time it took on flat worlds.

Tesan society had the food-gathering advantages of a tropical paradise, combined with dangerous environmental realities that encouraged technological innovation.

Time enough to be lazy, but reasons not to be, Lar thought, enjoying the cool, fresh air of the camp's mid-canyon location.

Nearby, the Tesans were at a game named *Chata-cho*, which translates loosely as "echo puzzles." One person would begin a chant, aiming it at the far wall of the canyon. As the echo returned, others would inject single syllables at varied intervals, trying to change the musical color of the chant and thereby "steal" it. The original chanter could reinforce his chant; or, if it was stolen, try to steal it back. Often the original chant would be echoing back for the fourth time, with all its overlays, before the complexity finally baffled the losers. Lar had not yet tried to play, but he enjoyed listening as much as anything he had ever done. He closed his eyes and lost himself in the variegated rhythms.

Strong fingers gripped his shoulders and began massaging. Lar looked up and saw Yoran.

"Mmph. That feels very good."

"I'll bet; you worked hard today."

"I enjoyed it, though, or at least I am enjoying it now."

Yoran smiled. "Honest work's reward is in its rest. You got a letter by radio today." He handed Lar the paper. Sighing, Lar held it to the firelight.

Lar:

Sounds like you've fallen in love again, and you're right. I do think you're acting just like you did on Salisbury. Your denial sounds like a husband explaining a lover to a wife, "It's not like the babysitter, honey: that was sex, this is love." Actually, I don't care about your love affairs with worlds, as long as you do your job, which you are not. Your last letter mentioned not a word about airfishers. Cultural notes are fine, but this expedition is not studying Tesans, just using them. Remember: this is an important expedition. The PR on the airfisher legend and the vertical-world bit has caught on more than we expected. A shirt with an airfisher's photo and the caption "I'm hooked!" sold four billion, just 4 days after the Interworld release. If this film falls through after all these expectations, it could ruin us.

Get moving!

Dr. Sarah Lowry

"I'm hooked!" Yoran exclaimed.

Lar turned and found the Tesan reading over his shoulder. He shrugged. "She's the boss."

"I've never heard of Salisbury."

"Paradise world in the Far Arm. It's quiet and green, and I relaxed too much there."

"But you love us?"

Lar blushed. "I like your culture, not just your world, that's what's different."

"Is that why you're so good at your job, because you like it?"

Lar crumpled the paper and threw it in the fire. "You read the letter. I'm not good at my job anymore. I just like forgetting about it. Places, no, make that *people*, like Tesans make it easy to forget." Lar sighed. "So tell me about airfishers."

"Didn't you learn enough about them in the storm?"

Lar looked Yoran in the eye. "What I learned in the storm had nothing to do with airfishers."

Yoran nodded. Both men were silent for a time.

"So how do you catch an airfisher?"

"I don't know, we've never caught one."

Lar raised an eyebrow. "The nets at the entrance to Moradan?"

"Protection only. Any diving airfisher that hits them dies. Airfishers breathe mostly through their skin, so if they stop moving, they suffocate, like Terran sharks, only much quicker."

"So we would have to catch them in the air . . . a wind tunnel kind of cage could hold them."

"Maybe, it has been suggested, but never tried. Airfishers are strange-creatures. If you shoot at them while they're attacking, they ignore you, seek no revenge."

"All's fair in war?"

"Right, but not in sleep."

"Sleep?"

"During the day, airfisher flocks soar on ridge lifts, usually in a hovering formation on a bluff or bowl. Only one of the flock puts out any sonar signals. That's the one we call the 'sonar leader.' The others fly slaved to his motions. We think they sleep."

"Sounds like an ideal time to capture one."

"If you bother a flock during the day, while they're in sleep formations, the whole flock will attack you and every creature like you for twenty echs in every direction."

"Nasty. So the choices are either catch one at night —"

"No one will fly with you at night against airfishers, no one."

"Then during the day, in a deserted area, say like the southern mazes." An idea was forming in Lar's mind.

"Away from medical aid or quick refuge." Yoran looked at Lar

intently. It was unsaid that it would be without guns.

Lar nodded. "No one said it would be easy."

Lar was not sleeping well. In the absolute darkness that was night on Tesa, he had worked most of his coffee-colored skin out of his unzipped sleeping bag. The nylon and down modestly held cover between his navel and kneecaps. Behind him on a second step-ledge, the blimp reflected Lar's motions, nervously testing its moorings in the subtle breezes of the night. The other sleepers snored on, oblivious.

The dream was vague but violent. It was unpleasant enough to push Lar to consciousness. His eyes opened, and instantly his body tensed. The muscles pulled into a single solid unit, tightened to the point of cramping. He blinked once.

Everyone, even the natives, wakes up very slowly on Tesa. Be it air mix, gravity, or some unexplained electromagnetic effect, for the first few moments of every Tesan morning, one has all the bright-eyed alertness of heavily drugged granite. The Tesans had told Lar that when he woke intellect was useless, so he must trust his gut reactions. Right now, Lar's gut was twisted taut with fear. *REACT TO YOUR GUT!* Lar grabbed his rifle, which lay exactly an arm's length from his sleeping bag. The metal was oddly moist and cool. *Not rain.* Lar looked up. There were no stars. *No stars?* A fragment of Tesan Holy words took shape in his head.

*The Lord by wisdom founded the world,
by understanding he established the heavens.
By his knowledge the deeps broke forth
and the clouds drop down the dew.*

Lar pointed his gun straight up and flicked the sight-lamp on. A narrow rod of illuminated mist appeared above him. *Killer clouds! The watch hasn't warned!*

Lar lowered his rifle and fired blindly towards the canyon wall. Rock splintered and fell noisily.

"*Ley, ley! Up, up! Kifraud! Killer clouds! Get guns and lights!*" Lar continued shooting as he stood up.

Voice-activated lights came on, casting misty shadows. On one side, the light leapt off the cliff to dissipate in the dark depths of the canyon. On the other side, it lit up the vertical stone face that rose two more kilometers above the camp. Only about fifteen meters of that span were visible through the fog.

The camp began waking up. Even in the chaotic lighting Lar could tell the newly arrived Interworld crew from the native Tesans. The

offworlders sat up and got no farther, while the Tesans hopped up instantly, guns ready. They had no more presence of mind than the Interworlders, but somewhere down deep they knew that when they *did* wake up, they would need to be on their feet with their fingers on the trigger.

Help on the way, Lar loaded and fired another clip, aiming into the cloud as Yoran had trained him. "Who's on watch?" he wondered out loud.

Others began shooting, and the blimp's camera lights came on, casting out all suggestions of the dark. Through a maze of scurrying bodies, Lar caught a glimpse of the watch station. Frank Leost, an Interworld photographer, was being displaced by an angry Tesan.

"Frank!" Lar shouted. "What are you doing on watch?"

"Fell asleep, Lar!" the photographer yelled back, shrugging. "Are some airfishers going to attack now?"

Lar bit back his anger. "Airfishers!" cried the watch. "85° up and 10° left!"

Lar aimed his gun in unison with twenty others. Somewhere up in the cloud explosive bullets tore into the cliff. Pebbles rattled on the ledge.

"First airfisher abort," the watch announced. "New ones 80° up and 5° left." The Tesan was speaking clumsy Interworld. Foolish, thought Lar, since everyone shooting — except for himself — was Tesan. Most of the Interworld crew was running for the safety of the blimp. Lar did see Frank Leost moving towards the cliff wall, camera in hand.

A dark shape sped by overhead, too far back in the mist to be distinct. It was the airfisher that had aborted its attack dive. Lar ignored it and fired his fourth clip into the coordinates the watch was calling out.

Another shape appeared, this one coming out of the cloud and into the light of the camp. The airfisher's huge, crescent-shaped body was dropping like a stone. Those up front immediately lowered their aim and fired. In the moment before it crashed, Lar realized that it had already been hit by the blind shots.

The diversion of the front guns was enough to let two airfishers through. They pulled out of their cliff-hugging attack dives and rocketed into the camp at waist level, intent on hooking meat. Lar shot the first one, as did several other gunners. He had no doubt that Lowry would later complain about "senseless mutilation of valuable carcasses." The body of the airfisher slammed to the ground, smashing into men and supplies. The second creature flew into the midst of the gunners, who could not shoot for fear of hitting each other. The natives dove to either side. Left alone in the middle was Frank Leost, busily snapping away with his camera. At the last instant he dove for the ground.

With all its dive speed, the airfisher merely flexed its wings a little and dipped down faster than Frank could fall. A hook on the creature's left

wing caught the photographer's shoulder, throwing the man wildly backwards. Frank screamed in terror and pain, though mostly terror, Lar thought. The airfisher banked left to avoid the blimp, then disappeared in the dark. The long hook cord played out silently, already tightened enough to begin dragging Frank slowly toward the void beyond the ledge.

Lar glanced only briefly, as Frank slid by. The photographer's hands were desperately grasping for something to hold; his feet dragged heavily. The scream gave way to diminishing gurgling noises. Lar could see the grey cord running from Frank's bloodstained shoulder to the nearby cloud. The airfisher was well beyond the lights.

Lar started to shoot the cord, but before he aimed, the last of the morning's fog lifted from his brain. He quickly pretended to see something at the wall and turned back to begin firing in earnest. *Stupid!* he fretted to himself. *How is that going to look on film?!*

Behind him the dragging sounds continued for a bare second, then stopped. Lar heard a receding cry which was cut suddenly short. Frank had gone over the cliff.

Above, several airfishers appeared tauntingly in the mist. Lar and the other Tesans lowered their guns. "All airfishers abort!" the watch confirmed.

Below his breath Lar intoned, "Dinner is served."

Dawn.

The camp was on the ledge of a noon cliff, so they remained in shadow. Across the canyon sunlight crept down the rock, starting convection currents that swept the mid-canyon free of the more stubborn mists. Below, the morning's vegetation rise floated up to meet the dawn. Above, a strip of blue was feathered with fast-moving cirrus.

Dr. Sarah Lowry paced through the narrow camp with a look on her face that prompted others to get out of her way. She was a tall, muscular woman of about forty-five. Her size and age robbed her of any hint of femininity and the weakness men tended to associate with it. She exuded a stubborn hostility.

When she found Lar treating an injured Tesan, her voice had the same tone as her looks. "I need to talk to you, Lar."

Lar did not look up. "Not now."

"Now!"

"I'm busy."

"Damn you! I've led seventeen expeditions to fifteen different worlds and I've never lost a single person!"

Lar still did not look up. "On Monu you lost three guides."

Lowry smiled sarcastically. "Those were natives, *your* job. This was an Interworld citizen, *my* job. I must know who was responsible."

Lar continued setting the splint. "It was Frank's own fault. He had

insomnia and struck up conversation with the watch. Somehow he managed to talk the fellow into letting him take the watch. After listening to what he was supposed to do, the idiot fell asleep. He paid for his own stupidity."

"Leost paid for that native's stupidity. He should never have let Leost on watch." Lowry paused to gather her anger. "When I finish with *that* idiot . . . who was he?"

Lar finally looked up. "His name was Frehn, and the Tesans threw him over the cliff at first light."

Lowry stood silent for a moment, then turned abruptly and stomped away.

"Bitch," Lar said in a low voice.

"Don't be nasty."

Lar looked behind him and saw Yoran sitting casually on a boulder.

"Don't you have anything better to do?" Lar snapped, and then instantly regretted it. The Tesan took the bait.

"We're all done, bwana." Yoran bowed mockingly. "We await only your command."

Lar frowned.

"Don't be sad, sahib. Think of the ratings the big movie will get with the photo-man's death in it. 'See the deadly airfisher devour human flesh before your eyes!' " Yoran paused. "Oh, but I forgot, you thought about that this morning."

Lar remembered that Yoran had been nearest him during the attack.

"You need not worry though: my lips are sealed, and I looked at the films a few minutes ago and you can bless odd angles, it doesn't show."

Lar felt old. Twenty years before he could have cared less what this half-educated barbarian thought. Lar noticed the other people around them and said nothing. *Why does it hurt now?*

At midday Lar had been flying for three and one-half hours. He paralleled the ponderous blimp effortlessly, feeling very much a part of his flyer. To his right a small cumulus rolled in a dropping rotor. Below, the distant river shot flashes of reflected sunlight at him through breaks in the silt clouds. To his left a flock of Tesan flyers circled in a tight formation. The pilots were trying out their helmet cameras. Lar chinned the general frequency and listened to Lowry berate them from the blimp.

"Move your heads slowly! Panning too fast just makes it blur. Look quick with your eyes, slow with your head. Number nine, quit looking at your wings, we have plenty of footage of that."

The Tesans were boycotting speech, a show of disgust.

"Remember that if you don't catch it on camera, it didn't happen! Okay, break into a line and film each other from different angles."

Lar crabbed closer to the circus and then picked out Yoran's flyer,

yellow with three red stripes. Finally he spoke to Lowry.

"What's the plan for the afternoon?"

"Just filming of incidental flying shots."

"Can I borrow Yoran to scout out tonight's camp?"

"Take him."

Lar switched to Tesan. "You heard the lady, Yoran; let's move."

"Yes, kemosabi."

"I wish you'd quit that. Where'd you learn all that stuff anyway?"

"First Expansion Film Appreciation, Kraline Academy for backwater primitives."

Despite himself, Lar chuckled, then tilted his head back to thrust ahead. They left the blimp in minutes, and finally rounded a turn to put them out of direct contact.

"Yoran, I want to talk about this morning."

Pointedly, Yoran said nothing.

"You are right, the film will make more money because of Leost's death, but that's not what went through my head when it happened. I just realized that it would have been a real crisis when you demanded that Leost be thrown over the cliff with Frehn. I also remembered that you had said that airfishers break off their attacks once they have meat on a hook." Lar stopped, and held his breath.

"That was pretty fast thinking for the morning."

"I was the first to wake up."

"True." Yoran was silent for a moment. "How long have you known Lowry?"

It was Lar's turn to be silent. Finally he replied: "A long time. We were partners in the beginning. She was a rich amateur photographer majoring in zoology, and I was a poor polyglot who enjoyed the outdoors. We started on Meta, the desert world, and went from there."

"Were you close at first?"

Lar thought a moment on the assumptions and perceptions the question showed. "Yes, we were lovers."

"What happened?"

"Time and distance. I was spending all my time advancing on God-forsaken planets, she was tied up in Interworld business. She got all the credit for 'Worlds Away,' which doesn't bother me any, but fame is the biggest distance of them all. Now she feels that every film is a major turning point in her career, proving herself to be an artist or a scientist, or a director, or whatever. . . . She's as trapped as any of the animals we've caught over the years."

"And what happened to you over those years?"

Lar felt purpose in the words, guided and sharp as a surgeon's knife. "I've lived on fifteen worlds. I've spent more of my life on other worlds, in other cultures than in my own. What happens to someone then?"

Yoran did not reply. They flew on in silence for a while, and Lar wondered if he was forgiven.

"Stay close to the left, we're coming to the Palaces."

"Palaces?"

"The Palaces of the Mighty. Didn't we ever take you there?"

"No. What are they?"

"It's the intersection of three canyons that you saw on the map. Hold on a minute, you'll see."

Lar did. The right wall of the canyon fell away, revealing a vast open area. The corners of the intersection had fallen down, widening it to distances unusual on Tesa. In the center, three isolated monadnocks rose defiantly from the rubble. They were immense columns of stone, more massive than any skyscraper built by man, and the emptiness around them only emphasized the point.

Lar stared for some time at the formation, until a violent gust of wind threatened to throw him into the canyon wall.

"The Palaces' courtyard generates mighty weather," Yoran said, and then led Lar down an invisible trail of relative calm.

"How will the airwhale cross?"

"Lower in the corner clouds. It'll be uncomfortable, and they'll have to feel their way on radar, but it'll be calm. I figured you'd appreciate the view."

"I do, thanks. Are the Palaces inhabited?"

"No; the winds are unnavigable. It's a special place to us, since it's one place we can't fly to." Yoran began a slow 360 in a rock-moss thermal, gaining altitude quickly. Then he spoke in a measured, low voice:

*Behold child,
The Palaces of the Mighty.
Home of the silent strength,
Abode of the quiet power.*

*Why, wise sir,
Are the strong silent,
And those with power quiet?*

*Behold child,
The clouds, the stone, the sky.
Grow old crossing the vastness.
Noise is the cry of the vain ledge dog,
Which proclaims its unchallenged domain to all.
Those that laid such wonders before us
Have no need of sounds that flee.*

Lar had no reply. After a time, Yoran found the altitude that he wanted and flew out of the thermal. In a slant dive he reentered the claustrophobic canyon at the shadow line. After one last look behind, Lar followed.

For cinematic effect, all the flyers launched simultaneously. The blimp strained its moorings perceptibly at the change in weight. Lar could almost hear the drumroll, almost quote the narration. Belatedly, he tried to concentrate on the plan as he banked away from the cliff.

He led the formation across the canyon in a wedge, moving far downwind of the cloud-shrouded bluff so as not to disturb the airfishers' sonar leader. Once across, they turned upwind in a vertical formation. With the rock between them and the airfisher flock, they moved into the wind. The sonar shadow was narrower the closer they flew, so Lar set the flight about a hundred meters downwind of the bluff's corner. The pilots spread into their assigned positions, adjusted attack angles, and added thrust to come to a nervous stop, midair. Everyone looked forward into the wind, waiting.

"Is the blimp unmoored, Dr. Lowry?" Yoran beat Lar to the question.

"Yes; are you ready?"

"As we'll ever be," Lar replied. "Turn the stunner over to the computer."

"Done. It may be a second before it finds a target."

It wasn't. At the edge of the mostly sleeping flock, an airfisher made a minute adjustment in its flight. The stunner aimed and fired instantly. Just as in the dry runs, the now totally unconscious airfisher continued its small turn, till the wind swept it around the corner of the bluff and towards Lar and his flyers. In minutes it was bearing down upon them.

The knowledge that it was unconscious did not seem to help Lar's peace of mind. The airfisher's central joint was bent slightly, putting it in a shallow dive. Its mouth was open.

"Begin the turnaround — now!" Lowry's voice was excited, but not fearful. *Because she's not here*, Lar thought.

The flyers, beginning with the upwind pilots, did 180s and began their own slant dives downwind. The airfisher caught up with them quickly; but true to Lowry's computers, their airspeeds matched perfectly.

Eight of the flyers moved into tight formation with the airfisher. Four flew above, left, right, front and back, with the same four positions mirrored below the animal. The other flyers buzzed around like dung flies, filming away. Lar soared over the formation, worrying.

"Okay, tighten up! Yoran, how's it look?"

Yoran flew the front-down position. He looked behind him into the airfisher's teeth and shuddered. "Okay, I guess."

"All right, in the sequence we rehearsed, begin with your hooks."

One by one, the Tesans pulled out long, hooked poles, and closed on the airfisher. They planted the hooks in what Lowry had determined to be non-vital areas of the airfisher's body. When they pulled away, the poles trailed lines back to the flyers. More than one Tesan chuckled nervously at the reversal of rôles.

Yoran was the last to set his hook. "Done," he said, "on three, up-front, up-left, and up-right begin tightening your lines. One. Two. Three!"

The three flyers climbed gently, straining against the ropes. The airfisher's flight leveled out.

"It's working!" Lar shouted. "Ready for a turn?"

Yoran looked behind him again. "The quicker the better."

Now the left-up flyer lifted, starting a slow right turn of the whole formation. With Lar's cautious urgings, the rest of the flyers pulled out their slack. Yoran added thrust, bringing the animal officially in tow.

"All snug?"

There were eight Tesan yesses.

"Time?" Yoran inquired, ever conscious of his position.

"Twelve point six." Lowry replied. "Finish that turn and I'll give him a second dosage."

Lar slid gently to the left to get an unobstructed view of the beast. As he did, the airfisher's wing shuddered ever so slightly. "Yoran . . . ?" Lar began, but he was cut short when the animal began to move around in earnest. Flyers shuddered and paused as their lines relaxed, then pulled back. In seconds the airfisher was whirling the eight flyers about in a violent, three-dimensional game of crack-the-whip.

"Lowry, fire now! Quickly! Frala, pull up! Lift its nose away from Yoran!"

The free flyers circled helplessly, cameras running. The greatest danger was not the airfisher, but collision between the flyers. The airfisher tossed them about like beads on a string. As Lar watched, left-up and front-up narrowly missed one another. Their strained lines crossed as their pilots cursed loudly.

"Dammit, Lowry, fire!"

"Got it!" she said, much relieved. The airfisher abruptly relaxed again, leaving the out-of-place flyers to fight a small left turn. They quickly corrected it. "Must have been an autoresponse, like adrenalin, responding to the hooks, increasing resistance to the stunner." Lowry was mumbling defensively now. "The stunner would have killed any of you that got in the way . . . uh, Lar, the airfisher broadcast some signals. Forty-seven bits."

Lar moaned. "What's the flock's status now?"

"No one's moved, but the sonar leader's signals have changed."

"Lowry, move that blimp at top speed. And lower —"

"Damn, there they go! The entire flock's broken formation and coming around the corner."

Lar looked to the clouds upwind. All at once twenty-two airfishers came through the mist. Lar watched numbly as the black shapes molded their formation for attack.

"They're heading for the blimp!" Now Lowry's voice held fear.

"Are we out of the stunner's range yet?" The stunner sat on a narrow ledge across from the airfishers' sleeping-bluff. Lar had intended to go out of range only when the blimp was in position to use wire stunners on the captured airfisher.

"We'll be out of it in a second."

Lar thought quickly. "If we fly upwind, staying in range, how many can you stun before they reach us?"

Lowry consulted the computer. "All but about seven, maybe six. I've already started."

"Good girl. Hold the blimp just inside stunner range. Yoran, take your catch to the air-cage. The rest of you move upwind with me, we've got to slow them down."

"Slow them down?" Yoran was incredulous.

"You told me yourself, once you bother them, they're committed to attack. Letting it loose won't do any good. If we confuse them with a lot of targets, and hold them till the stunner does its work —"

"We might make it," said one of the other pilots, "but we'll need to climb. If the airfishers go into their attack dives, we'll be at their mercy."

"Let's go, then!"

"Stay to the left to avoid stunner fire."

"Tighten up; we can scatter once we reach them."

There was a beep on Lar's radio, indicating that someone wanted to speak to him on the private frequency. He chinned his consent.

"Lar —" It was Yoran. "— be careful. Airfishers are born in the air, and that makes them better than Tesans at flying. Think in three dimensions or they'll get you."

"Thanks, I'll try."

The two formations closed on one another. The blimp and the captured airfisher moved slowly behind and below. The Tesans argued strategy over the radio.

"Higher! They've got too much speed already."

"If we go too high they might ignore us and go straight for the blimp."

"We should be so lucky."

Lar was silent, his mind full of recriminations. He was entirely unsure of his plan. The flyers were light and maneuverable, and with their

thrusters, could outrun and outclimb the airfishers in the short run. So long as they stayed in a small area, at a constant altitude, the airfishers would never be able to gain enough airspeed . . . but a small area? Lar looked at the airfishers, and saw another one drop from the flock. *Now.*

"Okay, thrust forward . . . pull up in front of them in a glide, then use your thrusters to get away."

The fourteen flyers met six airfishers. The airfishers lined up on the Tesans as though on collision course. At the last second, the targeted flyers pulled up sharply. Lar banked left to avoid one of them, only to find himself suddenly in the path of the hindmost airfisher. He turned the bank into a power dive and watched the creature flash by only two meters above his tail.

The flyers swung around for another encounter. The airfishers took the challenge and turned to meet them. Far below, Lar could see the blimp and the flyers towing the captured airfisher. Below the blimp hung the special wind cage.

As they moved to meet the attack, another airfisher dropped out of the formation, victim of the distant stunner. *We just might make it*, Lar thought. Then he saw an airfisher closing on him. He pulled up on reflex, then realized that it was too soon. The other flyers shot ahead of him, then dodged the airfishers at the last instant. Lar's airfisher rose to meet him. Lar tilted his head back and did a powered Immelmann. "Help!" was all he could gasp.

The airfisher closed. Lar let it pull close behind him, hoping to scare the animal with his thruster exhausts. He waited, remembering the impatience that had gotten him in trouble to begin with. The animal's mouth opened and closed with the beating of its wings.

"Lar, pull up."

Lar did. The airfisher almost touched one of Lar's wingtips, then Lar was directly above the creature, close enough to . . .

Too close. The airfisher's left wing rose and caught Lar's left wing full force. Lar heard popping noises and felt the strain through his controls. His flyer fell behind the airfisher in a flat spin. The airfisher banked around, ignoring three other flyers attempting to lure it away. It wanted Lar.

Lar looked at the Tesans, saw the cameras, and smiled.

His left wing folded and sheared away.

A violent spin grabbed Lar's flyer. As his view rotated, he saw the airfisher still coming towards him. At the last second, Lar jammed his controls, handles and pedals, to the right. For all his effort, the spin slowed little and flattened out even less.

But it was enough. The airfisher, aiming for Lar's exposed head, missed by less than two meters. Instead, it hit the flyer, breaking the keel and snapping the craft in two. Lar and the front half flipped over and

slammed into the carnivore's back. The flight straps popped like paper strips, and Lar was pressed between flesh and machine. Incredible pain flashed through Lar's right leg. He lay there for a second, as the airfisher and the wreckage were locked together. The animal was obviously stunned. Then the wreckage shifted, and Lar passed out as his leg was twisted further.

He awoke seconds later in free fall. He was on his back, gyrating wildly in an unstable position. His leg sang of death and torment. The airfisher whirled in his sight, but it was receding. Further above, the chaotic dance of man and animal continued. Lar twisted over and faced down, spreading his arms to stabilize. He was still subterminal, but even so, the air seemed to whip his leg with fire. Inverting his arch to look at the injured limb, Lar found the pants leg was blood-stained from knee to ankle.

Lar looked down and saw Yoran's flight still trying to dock their captive with the wind cage. Apparently, they were having trouble matching speeds. Lar was coming down right over the blimp. He brought his arms in and did a delta to the side, aiming to fall between the ponderous airwhale and the eight nimble Tesan flyers. In his pain-blurred mind was the thought that this would insure his being seen, and make certain his rescue.

Lar reached terminal airspeed as he fell between the blimp and Yoran's group. The Tesans were on his left, the Interworld crew on his right. Lar waved numbly as he went by.

A spell of dizziness put him in a slow turn. Through the haze in his mind, a question formed. *Where are all the stunned airfishers?* Lar stopped his rotation and concentrated on the canyon below. He spotted a dark crescent, barely discernible, far below and downwind. As he stared he saw three more. There were over a dozen airfishers in the lower air, and Lar suddenly realized that they would all be waking soon. If Lar were to open his chute too quickly, they would pick him off as easily as a meal dangling underneath one of their own.

Lar's eyes blurred, forcing awareness of the game of nerves he was in. Open too soon, and get eaten. Wait too long and pass out with the chute unopened. Lar tensed, trying to will himself into alertness. He reached down to his pilot chute pocket and hooked his index finger through the apex ring. When he pulled it out, the inverted chute fluttered madly in the wind. A green bridle cord snaked back to his main chute. He tried to gauge his altitude and consciousness. He waited.

In the distance, he saw an airfisher at his own altitude. At the cost of much pain, Lar rolled on his back. His mind was washed clean, but he still held the ring. High above him, the dark, clumsy blimp was set in brilliant blue and white. The flyers were tiny specks.

"The question is not," Lar mumbled to himself, quoting a forgotten proverb of another world, "who you take to bed, but truth asks, 'Who do



you wake up with in the morning?" "

Ground clouds were coming up quickly. Lar's mind was disassociating. He straightened his finger without thinking about it. Like a wild bird, the pilot chute spread its wings and took off, straight up.

Lar lost consciousness on opening shock.

If waking from sleep is a difficult thing on Tesa, coming out of an injury-induced unconsciousness is added injury in itself. Lar came to in sections, each floundering in dark and bloody nightmares. He knew at last that he was lying down. There were pains up and down his body. His nose and cheeks were scratched and swollen. Probing, he found what might be a cracked rib, a sprained wrist, and maybe some internal injuries. He felt nothing in his right leg.

Lar pried open his eyes. They seemed to be caked with dirt or dried blood. Yoran was leaning over him, tending to the leg Lar could not feel. Lar turned slightly, and found that he was on a narrow ledge only a quarter of a kilometer above a large bottom pool. The air was thick and moist.

Yoran noticed the movement. "Welcome back." He spoke without turning.

"Can I have some water?"

Yoran put a straw in Lar's mouth. "You almost had more water than you could ever want," he said, glancing back to the pool. "Were you unconscious when you landed?"

"Opening shock." Lar nodded weakly. He thought of the water, a danger he had not ever considered.

"Thought so; you've lost a lot of blood. You really got banged up against the wall. Leg's a double compound."

"Airfisher did that. How many did we lose?"

Yoran's shoulders sagged. "Three. Pydri, Mayd, and then Terrule got hit by the stunner. We got the monster, though. Lowry's happy, already heading back to Wiut with her prize. Almost wouldn't spare me to go back and look for you."

"Figures."

Lar saw Yoran's ledge-stalled flyer nearby, landing grapples tenaciously gripping the rock. Its bright yellow wings dripped moisture. There would be rain soon.

Yoran began preparing Lar for the journey back. He had flown in just above the river's surface, ever conscious of the angry airfishers that might still be about. Night was now filling the canyon; and if they were still in the area at dark, the airfishers would not wait for killer clouds.

Lar was tucked carefully into the cargo compartment, feeling drained of blood and energy. His pains were going numb to drugs, but his mind seemed to continue unhindered. Yoran said little.

The flyer launched smoothly. Yoran spoke over his shoulder to Lar. "The camp's about six hours away: the wind shifted, so it's upwind. I dropped power cells about midway for refuel. Lowry really pitched a fit about that. She was sure you were dead, diagnosed you in entirety as you fell by. . . ." The Tesan paused.

"Tell me something, Lar: these critical phases that Lowry always thinks her career is in, did you ever go through one?"

Lar thought, then spoke on impulse. "I think I just did."

"Really?"

Lar closed his eyes. "I'm not really Interworld anymore. I've been a go-between so long that I've lost my original shape. Can't say that I'm sorry about it."

Yoran was silent for a moment, then, "So where do you go from here?"

Lar was finally getting drowsy. "Does your ledge-home need any new men?"

"Home." Yoran spoke carefully. "That's a permanent kind of word, a rest-of-your-life word."

"Home, then. Let's go home."



Mr. Morrell tells us that he used to jump out of airplanes for fun, but now he flies off mountains. In this story — his second sale to this magazine — he shows us that even when his feet are firmly on the ground, his thoughts are ever in the air.

Well, yes; we are looking for stories, and from people who have never sold a story before as well as from long-time professionals. But no; we do not want to see you make the same mistakes, over and over again. So; we wrote and printed an 11,000 word booklet, *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy*, to help you with manuscript format, cover letters, return envelopes, and other details of story submission, along with some ideas on Plot, Background, Characterization, and Invention. These cost us two dollars each, with mailing and handling; we'd appreciate receiving this amount (check or money order, please; it's never wise to send cash through the mail). If you want two copies, send us \$2.50; three copies, \$3.00; and so on: in other words, 50¢ for each *additional* copy after the first one, which is \$2.00. If you subscribe to **Amazing™** Science Fiction Stories today, we'll send you a copy of the booklet free.

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IF YOU BELIEVE IN FOREVER . . .

THE STRATEGIC VIEW

by John M. Ford

The Forever War

Designed by James Griffin, from the novel by Joe W. Haldeman
Mayfair Games Inc.
PO Box 5987, Chicago, IL 60680
Boxed boardgame, \$17.00

In an essay that accompanies this game based on his work, Joe Haldeman says that if you want to read *The Forever War* (the novel) as no more than a slam-bang combat yarn, that's perfectly all right; there are many valid ways of reading any story. As if to take him at his word, Mayfair has provided two titles for the essay; it's called "A Million Wars" on the box cover, and "A Million Stories" inside. Take your choice.

Joe having said this — and I certainly agree with him, having myself written some books that the reader may take as sociopolitical satire or adventure, at discretion — it becomes a bit harder to review THE FOREVER WAR (hereafter, *italics* will mean the book, SMALL CAPS the game). First, one must determine how the designer interpreted the book; then, within that framework, decide how well he achieved his adaptation.

His interpretation: "a slam-bang combat yarn." If you're looking for the philosophical aspects of the novel — about war, communication, free will and taking orders — go back to the book; you will not find them in this box.

The box contains a mapboard of the surface of a "portal planet" — a little bit of space debris, of no use whatsoever except that it orbits a collapsed star, thereby "controlling the straits" of interstellar travel. Portal planets are

dull and ugly. So is the mapboard, crudely painted in shades of purple.

The counters, illustrated with equally unattractive sketches, represent fireteams of Human and Tauran infantry, support weapons, and bunkers. With only minor variations, the objective of every game is essentially the same: secure the portal planet for Our Side by exterminating Their Side.

Yeah, that's all. The green counters run over the barren surface of the portal planet, shooting at the orange counters; the orange counters shoot back. Sometimes a spacecraft swoops over, blasting any opposite-color counters dumb enough to line up for it.

What happened to all that hardware detail I remember so vividly from the stories? Heat-exchanger malfunctions and hypnoconditioning and cryocomponent critical temperatures and microton grenades and . . .

This is a good time to introduce a term of game-designer jargon: the word "chrome" refers to all those game rules and components that add atmosphere, flavor — the feeling that these particular counters and board represent power-armored grunts on a frozen planetoid, instead of German and Russian grunts on a frozen steppe, or Americans and Koreans on a frozen hill. Chrome, is, as with cars, a somewhat pejorative word; too much chrome sometimes covers a lack of structural strength. But without atmosphere, the game becomes a null experience: a matter of shoving cardboard chips and rolling dice against arbitrary numerical ratios. The gamespeak for *that* is "pushing wood."

In this game, nothing ever malfunctions. A unit is either OK, "pinned" (disorganized by enemy fire), or dead. A unit pinned while on hydrogen ice dies instead, a nod to the effects of heat-radiator fins against frozen gas. That's a little drastic, but it works. Troops may move at double speed on the ice patches . . . well, in the book, one could belly-slide across, but that required some preparation and care; here, the armor apparently is equipped with skates.

There are no rules to represent the Human hypnotic conditioning that turned the high-IQ UNEF soliders into laser-happy berserkers. The conditioning is mentioned once, in a scenario in which some troops mutiny in spite of it. Oddly, there are morale effects after a fashion, since pinning is at least as much a moral effect as it is physical dispersal; officers can unpin units, and this is called "rallying." So there *could* have been rules covering hypnoconditioning. But there aren't. As for the significant fact that the Taurans have a group mind . . . they may rally one another, instead of needing officers to do it for them. Period.

The effects of cultural and technological lag through time dilation, which in the novel became a powerful symbol of alienation, here translate into a column shift on the combat results table.

At the highest level of technology, the "stasis field" becomes available: a kinetic-energy-limiting field that forces the warriors of the distant future to fight with swords and bows. Not the subtlest irony in literature, but logically worked out, and leading to some surprising twists.

The system the designer has created to represent stasis-field combat works, but at the expense of logic. Several

rules exist only to make the system work. Once a side retreats into its field, they must remain there until the bitter end: why? The opposing side is forbidden from entering the field until all the defenders are inside: *why?* The field generator, besides having no **off** switch, is immobile — but in the novel, two men pick up a working generator and move it.

Here is one reason the game fails to capture the spirit of the book: *The Forever War* is full of "field expedients," desperate measures to handle situations not in the Army Field Manual. As Haldeman says in "A Million (Whatever)," real commanders often win battles by first determining what the enemy expects, and then doing something quite different.

THE FOREVER WAR is too limited in scope, details, and options to allow that. All the units are on the board at all times (unless they're hiding in a single "headquarters" bunker); no surprise movements are possible. (What happened to the armor suits' camouflage ability?) An enemy force a century more advanced than yourself merely gets better dice odds.

The box cover says "One to Six Players." Actually this is a two-player game, Humans vs. Taurans. There is a solitaire scenario, in which a Human force charges a cluster of Tauran automatic weapons (the artilleryists must be on lunch break, or something); the action consists of hoping the die rolls for the robot side are worse than your own. The six-player scenario is a free-for-all attempt to steal an unidentified "alien artifact" from the board center; why group-mind Taurans and Humans (the scenario is set after the War) are killing each other for this — since when one side has it, the others will know anyway — is never explained.


So much for interpretation:

THE FOREVER WAR fails as an adaptation of the novel, even on the level of pure battle-action; and it makes not the least attempt to be anything more.

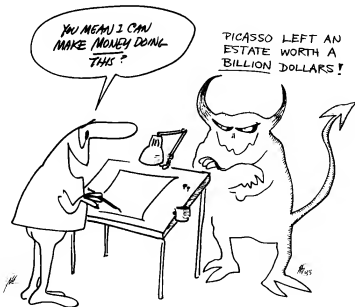
Maybe the game would have had more interest, more play value, if it had covered the strategic aspects of the War, provided some connective tissue between the slugfests, some *reason*; or, conversely, if it had brought us to the level of the individual trooper with his laser finger and internal-relief tube, given us people (or Taurans) to identify with. As it stands, there is no personality (even though there's a

counter that says "Mandella" on it), no meaning. Only green counters and orange counters on a piece of purple board.

I'm hard on this game because it attempts to do a major thing, adapt an important science fiction novel to game format, and it fails in a major way, as adaptation and game. It would certainly be considered a failure if it were *not* tied to a well-known book.

How oddly ironic it is that this game, from a novel about the dehumanizations of war, should itself be so dehumanized. 

CARTOON



William Rotsler

CARTOON

Alexis Gilliland

UNAMUSING

by Alan Dean Foster
art: Bob Walters

Since Alan Dean Foster's first attempt at a novel, The Tar-Aiym Krang, was published by Ballantine Books in 1972, his books and stories have been delighting readers almost everywhere. In addition to publication in English, his work has been translated into German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Flemish, Italian, Finnish (keep going), Japanese, Norwegian, Portuguese, and Hebrew; and the list will probably grow longer.

Two hundred house plants once assisted him in the writing of Midworld — no doubt they wanted to see how it ended.

I first encountered Nevis Grampion at the one-man show of his work the Met put on last winter. Or maybe I should say, the show he put on for the Met. Never was an artist greater than the sum of his aesthetic parts than Grampion. He was his own best canvas, utilizing words with the same skill as he did his palette. His paintings were bold, shocking, sometimes outrageous, never dull. He'd perfected his technique through twenty years of arduous practice in his barn loft studio. Arizona is full of old barns and new artists. The longevity of the barns usually exceeds that of the artists.

His work ranged from the competent to the brilliant. Not that the critics cared. Grampion was good copy and they delighted in provoking him to comment on the state of art today, the position of critics, the power of the large museums and galleries. Grampion's response rarely disappointed them.

What attracted me to him, however, was neither his skill with the brush nor his calculatedly abrasive personality, but rather the demon squatting on his right shoulder.

He was not an easy man to isolate. People clustered about him like cat hair to an angora sweater. He both attracted and repelled. Nevis Grampion, the Elephant Man of Art. I watched the people watching him and was reminded of witnesses to an auto accident.

Eventually I managed to get him alone by dint of following him through the gallery hall until the novelty that was himself had begun to wear off. He was polite to me, indeed cordial. I think he sensed something of a kindred artistic spirit. Besides, I didn't want something from him. Only to chat. I think that made me unique among those attending the show.

We discussed respective influences, I alluding to Wyeth and Bierstadt and Lindsay, he to Goya and Klee and Dali. We debated the relative merits of acrylic and airbrush, which I prefer, to his choice of oil. He bawled me out for employing the easier media and I suffered his well-meant criticisms patiently.

Eventually I could stand it no longer. I gestured toward his right shoulder, said, "Nevis, maybe I'm crazy . . ."

"Ain't we all?" he put in. He was unable to resist a chance to be clever. A congenital condition, I believe, which did not endear him to his public. The more so because he usually was.

". . . but is there or is there not what appears to be a small gargoyle perched on your shoulder?"

For the first time that day some of the slick veneer he wore for his fans slid away and I had a rare glimpse of the real Nevis Grampion.

"I'll be damned. You can see him?"

"Quite clearly." I moved close to study the apparition, which was ignoring me completely. I believe it was asleep at the time. It was quite solid, with nothing of the aspect of a dream about it.

"It is bright red, with splotches of orange, about a foot high in its squatting position, and has four horns projecting from its bald skull."

Grampion nodded slowly, watching me closely. "You see him all right. You're the first . . . no, the second one, ever. Maxwell was the other."

I thought of Jarod Maxwell, Grampion's close friend and exquisite portraitist in his own right.

"What," I asked, "is it doing there?"

Grampion made that funny half-pleased, half-angry grin that was featured so prominently in the papers. "His name's Clamad. He's my artistic muse."

Having already accepted the presence of this strange creature, it was easy to accept this new revelation. "Your artistic muse? You mean, he inspires you?" In truth, upon close inspection I thought I could see certain qualities in the creature's face which had been reproduced numerous times in Grampion's paintings.

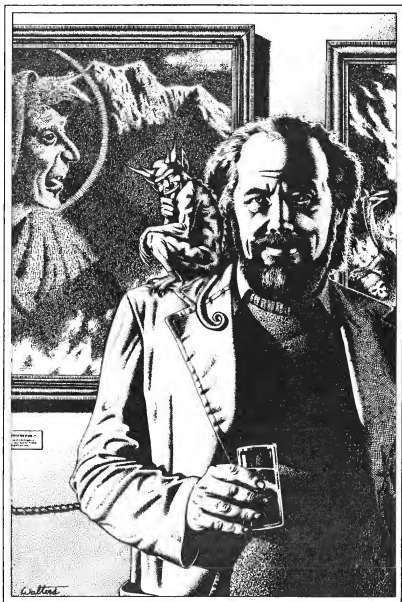
"You could say that. Clamad's been with me a long time. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be a painter."

"Really? What would you be?"

He shrugged. "Something more relaxing, less demanding of the mind. A long-haul trucker, maybe, or a librarian. But not a painter. Too painful. But I determined to be one long ago. I worked and worked at it and one day, whammo, there he was. He's been with me ever since."

Of all of us I'd always thought of Grampion as a born painter. To learn otherwise was something of a let-down, though it in no way detracted from the brilliance of his work.

"Can't you get rid of him?"



© 1993 Walters

He smiled sadly. "Don't you think I've tried? He helped me master my technique, bring to the fore everything I always wanted to say in my work. But once I'd accomplished that, he refused to leave. He drives me to keep topping myself, to hunt for perfection. Won't even let me sleep unless I at least begin a new study every day." His eyes were growing slightly wild as his voice dropped to a whisper.

"Look, you can see him. That means you must understand, at least a little, even if your own work is still too facile, too untested. What if I could persuade him to switch places? Would you have him?"

The offer took me aback. Around our little corner the party continued to seethe. Conversation, cookies, dried-out little sandwiches, liquor and carbonated waters and in the middle of it Grampion, the demon, myself.

Clamad the muse shifted slightly on his clawed crimson feet, grunting in his sleep. I shivered and, even so, was tempted.

"If I agree, what will happen to me?"

"Not much," said Grampion a little too eagerly. "He'll sharpen your style immediately, fasten on what natural uniqueness you possess, refine your technique, clarify your visions, bring out the hidden inside you and show you how to put it to canvas. Or masonite, or art board, whatever you choose. You'll be world-famous within a year."

"And what does he demand in return?"

The demon yawned. Grampion eyed his shoulder. "Only responsiveness and artistic dedication. His pleasures are simple. He fastens himself to artists with potential because he likes to see the results. Paradoxically, he can't paint a lick himself."

"Let me think about it." Suddenly the hall seemed dark, the overhead lights dim. The conversation around us had begun to fade as if something had deliberately muted all other talk, and I felt my throat constrict.

"Sure. Sure, you think about it. Think about what you're missing, with your silly pretty pictures. Acclaim, fortune, the admiration of your colleagues. Think about it." He was as disappointed as he was sarcastic.

"If he's such a prize to have around, why are you so anxious to get rid of him?"

"Who said I was anxious? I'm just trying to help out a younger artist, that's all. I . . . I need to rest. I've done it all, accomplished everything I'd hoped to do as a painter. It's time to share the wealth. Maybe I'll take up tatting. You think about it. When you're ready, come see me." He fumbled in his pocket, produced a business card. "You know Paradise Valley?"

"A little."

He nodded once, then turned and vanished into the crowd. I watched him borne away by several obsequious collectors, Clamad the demon visible like a red searchlight above the clutter of humanity. A searchlight only I could see.

I don't know why I went up to the house that night. Temptation, temptation. A subject I'd often tried to render in paint and now was acting out.

I went home thinking of Grampion's words, of the wealth and independence his work had brought him, the independence to thumb his nose at even the most influential critics, those same critics who casually dismissed my own work as purely "commercial," a stigma I had striven for years to escape.

Nowadays I am wiser, but then I was young, and impatient.

There was no answer to the bell, but the door was unlocked. I considered. Had I not established a rapport of sorts with Grampion? Surely he would not object to my surprising him, even at so late an hour. He was said to be fond of surprises. I fancied he would be happy to see me, for though he had many casual friends, he knew few who understood him.

I called out past the opened door. There was no reply. Now that was odd, I thought. Surely he would not go out and leave the place unlocked. I entered, made my way through the central atrium, the kitchen area, down a hallway toward bedrooms unslept in. By my watch it was eleven o'clock. The moon lit my path.

Gone out for a minute, I thought. Artists are notoriously unpunctual eaters. Cake and chocolate at midnight in place of a balanced meal. I resolved to wait until he returned.

A grandfather clock boomed portentously from the salon, announcing the time. I perused the well-stocked library, the *objets d'art*.

Then there was a sound. A stifled cry, almost a whining. I frowned and debated within myself. Grampion had many enemies. The door, unlocked. Could I have stumbled onto a burglary or worse? Was Grampion lying somewhere nearby, bleeding and in need of immediate help?

I armed myself with the nearest heavy object . . . a trophy of carved marble, presented by some society of European avant-garde artists . . . and moved cautiously in the direction of the sound. As I drew near a part of the house I had not yet visited, the rhythmic roll of anxious breathing reached me. I was reminded of a marathon runner well along his course.

A door was open and light stole from beyond. Cautiously I pushed it open all the way.

Grampion stood in his vaulted studio, in front of an easel. A half-completed canvas rested there, full of mad, violent colors and strokes. The subject matter was still indistinct but the breathtaking talent behind the work was already in evidence.

Crouching behind Grampion was a giant, glowing red thing. Its eyes were open now, the pupils black slits that probed the canvas. No longer decorative and modest, it was immense and muscular. Each of its huge, clawed hands held one of Grampion's wrists prisoner. There was a brush in each hand.

Grampion turned and saw me. I was shocked at his appearance. His face was flushed, his eyes bulging and red, his expression one of desperation born of complete exhaustion.

"Help me, Malcolm!" he pleaded, his voice hoarse, the words painful. "For the love of God, make him stop!"

My gaze moved from the thin, drawn specter of the painter to the demon who would not let him rest, who drove him to brilliance and madness and near death. At that moment he, Clamad, noticed *me*. He let out a threatening growl which turned unexpectedly into something else. Something at once less and more inimical.

A flicker of interest.

I turned and fled screaming from the studio, from that accursed house, down the road outside, my path lit only by the moon. I fled past my parked car and did not stop running until I was aboard a city bus and on my way home. The other passengers stared at me. I did not see them.

I saw Grampion several times after that. He was always unnaturally subdued in my presence, but unapologetic. Only I knew the real reason for those circles around his eyes and the nervous, jittery movements of his body. Clamad rode his shoulder as always, asleep as always, each time seemingly a little plumper. I wondered just how he fed off Grampion, for it was evident that he did, but by mutual consent we restricted our subsequent conversations to art and related topics.

I've given up art for art's sake. Now I make my living in advertising, where there is little need for the dirty inspiration a muse like Clamad can provide. But every so often I will see a thoughtful shadow flitting about the office, probing the work of Mark or Jillian or Carrie, searching for promise, for talent, for a victim.

I avoid mirrors.



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THE REVENGE OF THE EMPIRE

FILM CRITIQUE

by Algis Budrys



photo: Ralph Nelson, Jr.

Executive producer George Lucas, far left; director Richard Marquand, far right; and the cast: Harrison Ford, Anthony Daniels, Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Kenny Baker, and Peter Mayhew.

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It's become obvious that something went wrong with the *STAR WARS* * trilogy. Perhaps it didn't really go wrong, but many people have theories on what went wrong.

Huge numbers of people shuffled and buzzed in line to see *Return of The Jedi* in its first few days. But afterwards an articulate number of them didn't know what they thought of what they'd seen.

What we come to is the conclusion that the *STAR WARS* trilogy is probably fun. It was made, after all, by the same man who made the original *Star Wars*, and that was certainly fun. So whatever George Lucas does now *must* be . . .

Yes, well, that's one of the problems. How can George Lucas, working on the second and third films in the series, possibly have been the same as the George Lucas who worked on *Star Wars* in relative obscurity? Huge success must inevitably have warped him, must have led to excesses of ego which — But that's a very cheap shot, and besides there's strong evidence that Lucas hasn't changed anywhere near enough to fit that theory. Then what may have changed is our view of him. That, too, would be only natural.

When we first heard of *Star Wars*, it was just a reasonably likely project being worked on by the maker of *American Graffiti* and of an obscure low-budget science-fiction feature called *THX 1138* that few of us had ever seen. Our focus on George Lucas has been shifted drastically since then. It seems reasonable to

suppose that some of our present demands on him are unreasonable.

But if we care that much about *STAR WARS* getting the treatment we want for it, then Lucas has attained one of the highest artistic objectives. He has made his creation so much a part of the general culture that his audiences feel proprietary rights. It has gotten to the point where we don't trust him to have done right by what he has made ours.

Oh, by the way. Are we, here in the community of speculative fiction — we people who look regularly into copies of magazines called *Amazing Stories*, and who have some idea of the difference between science fiction and fantasy, and of their kinship under the umbrella of speculative fiction — are we part of that general culture to which *STAR WARS* manifestly belongs? Do we want to be?

That is, does our opinion *matter* to the broad general public, do we care if it matters, in what way does it matter to us if to no one else? *Oh*, it's a quandary! What to think, what to feel, what to decide . . . what a tangle we are tangled in!

Let's review the bidding:

In every era of history, one individual portrait limns its time. Fair Helen beckons from the topless towers of Ilium, Adolf Hitler rages against a backdrop of burning cities. Grunting Al Capone hoists a flask of bathtub gin and nurses his spirochetes. And our doom is that forever, when they want to recall our time in

*In this review, *STAR WARS* refers to the entire trilogy; *Star Wars* to the first movie alone. The titles *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi* are registered trademarks of Lucasfilms, Ltd.

one flash of recognition, future popularizers will show us playing with Darth Vader dolls.

But that's a clue. It's not the face of George Lucas we see. Out of the hurly-burly in which *Return of the Jedi* does as much to sell an issue of *Time* as *Time* does to sell the third *STAR WARS* film, there has emerged a cult not of Lucas's personality but of popular consumption. In a sense, the focus of the cult is us . . . that large, general "us" in which the SF community is just a tiny floating component. And in that cult, we the public are increasingly reluctant to test the actual worth of the central product; we want only to know when the next convocation will be held.

Among "us" there are many who aren't even aware *STAR WARS* is some of that science-fiction stuff. You get a Weber for the patio, a Cutlass for the driveway, and you get *STAR WARS*.

And there are too many such people for all of them to even be living in the twentieth century. In that population — not at all clear on the difference between a solar system and a galaxy, too dazzled to care that the rockets have nothing to push against, enjoying the thump of explosions in outer space — are people who just take it all on faith.

And among *those*, you may be sure, are some who are not just charming. There are so many *STAR WARS* fans, their numbers must include some who honestly feel that all scientists should be strung up from lamp-posts, that most books ought to be burned, that most segments of the population ought to be driven back over the seas, and that in general things ought to be simplified back to manageable levels.

STAR WARS cuts across all the

subcultures. Anything that draws enough audience for about seventy-five million dollars' worth of business the first week must, in truth, be getting some of its clientele from Mars.

There are significant differences between the demographics of the *STAR WARS* audience and any other concatenation of human beings that has ever existed. Neither George Lucas nor we can be asked to account for it or cope with it. But, looking at the magnitude of the phenomenon, it pays us to try to grope toward some understanding of what it all means, because somewhere in there is the answer to what it is in speculative fiction that has the potential to mobilize so many people. It's not just Lucas who's riding the avalanche; we may be pelting along on a downhill tumulus of our own.

We ought to take another look at where it all comes from; at what conscious or half-conscious impulses in the young George Lucas led to his mind's formation of the *STAR WARS* story, and what makes him want to tell that story to the world.

It began somewhere in the area where *American Graffiti* and *THX 1138* can be reconciled as the work of the same artist. *American Graffiti* is a story about growing up lower-middle-class urban in the domain of the '55 Chevy. *THX 1138* is about an individual, THX, growing up rebellious in a below-ground, technologically-supported, totalitarian culture. It takes a while to realize that they have the similarity of both being social documents.

They also have a subtle dissimilarity. The one is informed by the gritty realism of Lucas's own rites of passage, although it still falls far short of *cinéma-vérité* because of various conventional romanticisms that have

been imposed upon it and excused as the glow of nostalgia. The other is an essentially hortatory generalization very much in the mode of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; *Brave New World*; *Fahrenheit 451*; Ayn Rand's *Anthem*; and Evgenyi Zamyatin's *We*, the Daddy of them all. (Which makes Wells's *The Time Machine* the grand-daddy of them all, for its Morlock/Eloi culture and the anguished social ruminations of its disillusioned protagonist. It was Zamyatin, however, Wells's admirer, who thought to put that message into a cultural format more overtly resembling those of our own time.)

Most people who have seen *THX 1138* have seen it in two sorts of hindsight. They have come to it after *Star Wars*, out of informed curiosity, and they have seen a somewhat updated version. Either way, what they see is a display of considerable ingenuity at making a respectable film for very little money. The stark white sets and disposable white costumes, for instance, both serve a graphic effect and cost very little; the nearly surrealistic effect, just this side of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, dovetails nicely with the manner in which THX is played. He is played as a startlingly effective maniac, because the young George Lucas had the wit to get the young Robert Duvall to play the rôle. With his glittering beady eyes and the muscles of his jaw packed with tri-nitro-toluene, Duvall as THX looks, throughout, as if straitjacketed and waiting to be taken away in a *M*A*S*H* Jeep.

I don't think it's possible to decide where that performance comes from; whether it originated in Duvall's huge gifts as an actor, or in Lucas's prodigious breadth of talents as an *auteur*, or — as seems much likelier

— they arrived at it together in one of those happy decisions that spring out of the air in Hollywood to make up for all the turgid ones. Whatever, playing THX as a person visibly quivering with tension and nearly drooling with mania, almost palpably rank with sweat inside his featureless social uniform, represents a major deliberate or accidental artistic insight. How do I mean? Here's the scenario:

THX is a functionary; a cog in the social machine, bred for the purpose. He does the same thing every day. He is allowed female companionship, but he is not allowed love or procreation. Children are produced by the state, biomechanically, to fit projected social needs. When his love becomes pregnant, she is subtracted from the social mix, and the attempt is made to extract his individuality. Terrified and repulsed, he flees, eventually reaching a tube leading up to the surface. As he nears the wild, uninhabited face of Earth, the society gives up its pursuit of him, and he stumbles out, panting and free, to be silhouetted against an orange-yellow Sun distorted by the atmospheric lens effects of either dawn or sunset. We fade out.

Presumably, Lucas's intended effect is to make us cheer the ending; his breadth is not matched by a similar depth, so although he must have felt Duvall was playing the rôle right, it seems unlikely he reached a reasoned conclusion about why it was right. The reason it's right is because this story is a tragedy and THX, far from being a hero, is a demented fool.

Let's go over the ground again. THX's society has been in place for some time, perfecting its methods. THX is selected to fill a particular slot, bred and trained for that slot,

and put into it the same way bicycle team managers look for wiry people with bunched thighs and calves, slim upper bodies and narrow skulls, self-directed personalities and a strong streak of sadomasochism. Big-time bicycle racing makes such people happy as few other human situations do. There is no reason to suppose that if they were bred for it they would be any less happy about it than are the ones who now occur naturally in our population, and are lucky enough to discover their métier.

Somehow, THX nevertheless feels unhappy, to the point where he seeks love and finds a responding female, who presumably also was bred and trained to be a better citizen than that. Both of them are crazy. Everything that follows thereafter is crazy behavior, including THX's eventual flight into an environment of which he knows nothing, in which he will either starve or be rent by predators, and will lie with ants parading in and out of his ribs while naïve audiences for the film are applauding his nobility.

The fact is that THX, like the heroes of *Nineteen Eighty-four* and all their ilk, is a hero only in terms of ideals held in our time, not in his. The fact is that in a society like THX's, an aberrant THX could hardly appear, and if he did, his impact on society would be nil or nearly so. Once again Lucas has been smarter than many other producers of similar fare (although it's still easier to believe this, too, was an intuitive decision). When society gives up chasing him because it's stopped being cost-effective, that's *right*. When Logan comes back to the city of *Logan's Run* and finds society so rigid that his rebellion cracks it all wide open, and the happy multitudes

emerge to take instruction and example from dotty old Peter Ustinov, that's *wrong*; it's senseless.

Consider this: either society is ultrarigid, and thus vulnerable to fracturing at the touch of a single protester, but so practiced that no protester can appear, or else society is still flexible enough to resist protesters in any practical number because it must inevitably have been less invulnerable in the past. Ergo, it has much experience with protest; and if it has reached the present day at all, it is because it knows how to accommodate to it.

And as a matter of fact, there are people who will tell you that's a rather down-home picture of life as she is lived in the board room, in the halls of academe, and out where they wear the blue collar and carry the bucket. A great many of us know in our bones that THX is a nut; and we have heard the message before, sometimes from our own flayed hides. If there's a reason why *THX 1138* remained an obscure film until rescued by external circumstances, and if there's a reason why *Logan's Run* succeeded only well enough to spin off an abortive TV series, that reason might have been operating there. The *THX* and *Logan* message is hardly new, and in our hearts we're sick of it.

Grant you, it's greeted with enthusiasm in some quarters, because it evokes our contemporary ideals and we all know we should espouse them: people shouldn't be oppressed, regimentation should be fought by all truly worthy people, and love — by which we mean an aggravated instance of mystical intuition — will conquer all, as long as the opposition can be forced to play fair.

* * *

Let's coin a label. Protagonists who make no sense in terms of their own milieus, but remind us of things we're supposed to hold dear, are Recollective Heroes. Recollective heroes abound in speculative fiction: more in comic books and on TV than in contemporary magazines and non-juvenile books.

The most notable recollective heroes of our general time are Spock and Kirk: Spock because his scenarios evoke heavy emotional effects playing against his asserted lack of emotion; Kirk because this hardened old spacedog, veteran of the promotion ladder and service on a score of lesser ships on lesser errands, spends every episode quoting pop philosophy, psychology, and sociology like a 20th century tea-room populist, while serving under military discipline centuries from now.

There's no straightforward explanation why this sort of protagonist occurs more often on series TV and in other juvenile media than he does in SF aimed at the adult audience. But if I were looking for that explanation, I would look first at the popular American notion that all fiction should have some educational purpose, and juvenile fiction more so. I think we have taught ourselves to perceive hortatory stories as being the best kind to set before the young, open mind . . . presumably so as to close it as expeditiously as possible into configurations approved in previous generations.

If that is true, a great deal of fiction, and a great deal of SF, is deliberately anachronistic. Future generations, lacking our bias favoring it, may be astonished at how regressive the assertedly-freewheeling SF medium often was. But in our own time, speaking worthy things brings

approval and rewards.

These observations may not have been a digression at all. There are two likely explanations for the content of *THX 1138*, and one of them is that Lucas was driven down that pipeline by youthful concepts of what is excellent in the arts. The other one is that we are meant to burst into saturnine laughter at the conclusion of *THX 1138* — that it is a conscious put-on of that entire school of speculative fiction. I would like to believe that because I would like to believe George Lucas is superbly more than a superb cinematic technician. But then there's his next film, *American Graffiti*, which is publicly acceptable for its nostalgia to exactly the extent it shades away from strict realism.

Again there's room to consider a charitable explanation, sometimes known as the Bizet gambit. ("If they want *merde*, I'll give them *merde*!" said the man who was about to compose *Carmen*.) If Lucas had found that the public failed to appreciate *THX 1138* because it misunderstood some dark humor in him, then perhaps he made *Graffiti* the way he did because he had disgustingly lowered his sights. A similar phenomenon could then explain the persistent changes in *STAR WARS*, with each successive episode getting murkier and more pretentious, less direct and more sentimentalized. But it wouldn't explain why the first *Star Wars* seems to be so different from *any* film Lucas has done, before or since it.

That's the crux, you see. The film that gave most of us our first impression of Lucas's touch appears not to have been at all typical, either of Lucas's approach to film in general or of his approach to SF. There are several ways to appraise the possible

causes and effects of that, and in an outré sort of a way it's fun to look at them:

First, we have to deal with the way *Star Wars* is different from *STAR WARS*. For the moment, we can neglect the possible reasons for that difference, and simply sum up the fact that *Star Wars* is an apparently straightforward drama of good versus evil. The Empire, corporate bully, is attempting to wipe out the last traces of the Rebel little guys. Perhaps the Big People are out to crush their offspring into shape . . . to live forever off our suffering; pick your symbolic structure. In any case, we can feel oppression very plainly as soon as the huge, *basso profundo* "Star Destroyer" grinds into view, potting away at the yipping, scurrying little escape craft carrying R2-D2 and C-3PO. When we see the suppliant Princess Leia, in holographic projection, begging Obi-Wan Kenobi to help her, the archetypes are irrevocably established; we have the maiden in distress, and her two faithful servants. (R2, in *Star Wars*, is a lot more like Mickey Rooney than he becomes in the subsequent films, where he begins to resemble the rather harder Huntz Hall. And C-3PO, while obviously accustomed to a life of palace intrigues, has not yet become almost embarrassingly epicene; it will do our rationales good to recall this when we look back from the later films.)

Good, industrious, idealistic Luke Skywalker, formed by his association with the avuncular Kenobi, clearly made of more sensitive stuff than his homespun nominal parent-figures, goes to market to get some needed labor-saving machinery. Luke is a *good* boy. When the Empire strikes

his home in his absence, it is a *bad* empire for sure. But now Luke, with Kenobi's help, is free to fare forth in search of his birthright.

Let's be careful out here. Luke does *not* have any inkling of the complex Freudian/Jungian destiny that winds him in its ceremonies over the course of the next two films. He doesn't have to. The figure of the natural-born prince, set free by tragedy to depart his mundane birthplace and seek the metropolitan culture exemplified by the uncle-figure, has been in human folklore since the Brothers Grimm and before. An anthology of SF stories that had used this archetypal matrix prior to Lucas would require not one book but a five-foot shelf.

Details would only slow down the pace with which the archetypal situation communicates itself. We know *exactly enough*: what's happening, what its potentials are, and that sooner or later young lad and distressed princess are bound to meet.

The situation is as plain and as broad as daylight; it barely needs dialogue, and it gets very little. About as metaphysical as we get is in the few Kenobi references to "The Force." We don't have to know *what* Force; THE force; all stories of this kind have a magical or at least a moral Force in them, and we not only don't boggle, we greet its appearance with a relieved sigh of recognition.

To balance all this, a black-dyed villain must appear, and so Darth Vader does, fluffing aside mere admirals in the Imperial navy, implacable, as humane and bending as the grille of a '68 Caddy. He's quite staunch enough to symbolize the Empire all by himself, no on-stage Emperors needed. It is already clear from the casting — serene Alec Guinness on

the one side, the looming Darth and the snippy Peter Cushing on the other — that all the archetypes are in fully sufficient dramatic balance.

Robin Hood and Little John must yet appear, to demonstrate male bonding and do the rough work Luke is not suited for, and to provide Han as a potential rival for Leia's affections. Thus, in short order after Han and Chewbacca appear, the entire company is cutting and thrusting, dashing and wisecracking, and pitting itself against impossible odds.

It's wonderful stuff, each piece meshing. Finally, with a denouement scored for howling TIE-fighters and ascending electronic beeps, the rebels smash through. We close out on the medal-pinning validation ceremonies borrowed from *The Triumph of The Will*; and, in the clever blare of John Williams's brassy theme, Leia gives both Luke and Han a roguish wink and a nudge. Fade out, shouting with glee.

And that was all there was to it. The good old story, told with incredible verve and a razor-sharp sense of balance between straight exposition and high camp. (If you fail to appreciate the thin-ness of that balance, consider that every one of the *Star Wars* imitators, no matter how ambitious its special effects or talented its cast and crew, toppled on one side or the other of that delicate tightrope.)

Now — could this balance have been an accident?

Maybe it wasn't. In that case, *Star Wars* might represent another time when George Lucas decided he'd mis-estimated the audience and would have to make changes if subsequent films were to reach their optimum audience.

The problem with this theory is that *Star Wars* certainly seemed

to be a sufficiently popular, sufficiently powerful work of art at the time, didn't it? Inasmuch as he had broken all records, upset all the smart-money predictors, and in one swoop made himself forever independent of the whims or even the policies of anyone else in the film business, is it likely Lucas was less than satisfied? Can a man's head contain a larger dream than *Star Wars* made come true? I doubt it; certainly not back then, before *E.T.* and before *Jedi*'s opening week.

No, unless we get some startling fresh evidence, we have to assume that *Empire* and *Jedi* differ from *Star Wars* in ways that were not fully intended, if only because *Star Wars* may be different from what Lucas was trying to achieve with it. In which case, we have an explanation for how it is possible to like *Star Wars* but be increasingly dismayed by the rest of the trilogy, and how it's possible to be a fan of what Lucas signed his name to but then discover, to one's rising dismay, that Lucas is on a track one hesitates to follow.

If *Star Wars*' stark motivations and dialogue (what a real film critic would call its "filmic quality") were what particularly attracted you, as they attracted me, we can hardly be blamed. The essence of film is the absence of dialogue, or at least of dialogue for its own sake. The essence of film writing is the creation of moments so pellucid that the pace and direction of the characters' progress are conveyed through what is seen, and only graced by what is heard.

That's only one theory of filming, to be sure. It is the only one that's native to motion pictures, as distinguished from earlier dramatic forms,

and it seemed altogether reasonable to assume it was Lucas's guiding artistic impulse.

More than that, it was the perfect artistic frame of reference for a science-fiction film. It was the natural and, in the hindsight of what *Star Wars* seemed to be, the obvious way to succeed where so many had failed and so many more had barely escaped failing.

Dramatized SF has always had at least two potential sins: an emphasis on special effects, and a bias toward overt Deep Thinking.

The essence of a special effect is to *not be seen* . . . to hang a camera on a skyhook beyond the fuselage of the twisting biplane, to place, on an empty back lot, an illusion of endless steppes, crenelated fortresses, and trotting columns of armored horsemen. No one outside the industry ever admired a special effect as a special effect until SF films came along, because only SF films are sufficiently "unreal" *imprimis* to awaken the audience's sense for the necessary artificialities of filming.

Equally technical ploys in Lucille Ball movies went completely unremarked. Similarly, no one ever expected a movie about chorus girls to contain a Lucy speech about The Meaning of This Thought and How it Relates to All our Lives.

Most SF-film special effects, like most SF-film Deep Thinking, call attention to themselves via their crudity. But the same truth applies when the special effects are technically worth bragging about. Any time you call the general audience's attention to some inside feature initially meant to unobtrusively forward the *story*, you are fundamentally confused about what art it is you're practicing.

And the other half of the proposi-

tion — that Big Thinks are equally obstructive — is at the very heart of either what's wrong with *STAR WARS* or what's wrong with saying there's something wrong with *STAR WARS*.

So let's tackle that once and for all, and try to decide which it is:

Living as we do in a haze of chronic hype, we tend to forget that the important things about a piece of creativity are the things it conveys to the audience. What we see all too often is the work of creativity relegated to serving as the focus for hype. To give a specific example, the important thing about the special effects in *Jedi*, apparently, is not their ability to make us believe Jabba the Hutt's barge is actually floating above the Eternal Mouth in the desert; it is to add one more special effect to a film which is publicized in part by counting the special effects and bragging that there are more of them than in previous *STAR WARS* films.

This is a way of telling the audience that it shouldn't get lost in the story of Leia's and Han's rescue; it should, instead, be pulling its attention back from these events and peering around for wires and flickering edges. The scene is not about the characters, it's about the film.

Similarly, we are not really to believe Luke and Leia are riding antigravity machines at heartstopping speeds through a dense forest. Heavens, no! We are to *realize* this is a special effect. And, as a matter of fact, we get a little help with this because it's a rather poorly done special effect. But we're not supposed to care that it saps the believability of the story; we're supposed to cheer the addition to the census of special effects, which is, in the end, a case of

not applauding the meaning of the triumphal climax but of, instead, applauding the money spent on it. Where they once pinned on a medal, now they unfurl the pages of their bankbooks.

And, exactly similarly, every instance of an overt, explicit Big Think expressed in film dialogue is the same sort of sadly confused gaffe. Cinema is viable as an art form, because it can do something unique with drama. Picture a proposed art form in which life-sized photographs of actors in costume are displayed on a stage while tapes of their dialogue exchanges are played to the audience. That's anti-film. Now take a fresh look at movies. Movies are not talking books.

Movies are a medium for telling stories through motion and expression, accenting this pattern of actions with appropriate sound effects, some of which can be words. The reason some of them can be words is because people in the throes of action will utter words. But in real life, as distinguished from what happens in live theater, these words are reflexes, like facial expressions and bodily postures, displaying inner processes that have already taken place. Whereas in staged drama and in most books, the dialogue provides motivations for actions that will serve as reflexes to the words.

The dialogue needs of films and stage plays are thus completely different, as are the dialogue needs of books. Only when they are represented as filmed or taped versions of stage plays, or (bad) recreations of books, can films and teleplays make some legitimate claim to a need for long expository speeches. An original screen story that needs any such device is a screen story that hasn't yet

been properly thought out.

Now, that may sound like an extreme statement, because we all know lots of movies made from original screen stories that are less than good by that definition. That's perfectly true. No one ever said very many films are anywhere near the ideal film. Not many plays and books are anywhere near their ideal forms, either, and that's a legitimate concern nevertheless. And what we're talking about in the case of this particular set of films is that *Star Wars* was, as near as makes no difference, some sort of ideal film. Or are we going to be asked to believe it was the SF content that made it so wildly popular?

All right, to answer the question: no, SF content has usually been a proven drug on the film market once you get past the matinee audiences and the drive-in genre, as Lucas himself indicated with *THX 1138*. And as if to underscore Lucas, none of the *Star Wars* ripoffs did at all well. The amazing thing to many people was that Lucas somehow made SF pay in this unprecedented manner. What did he do to SF that made it perform so?

It seems perfectly plain to me that he perfectly mated story and medium; that he for whatever reason made an ideally filmic film around the one form of SF that had been waiting for someone in films to discover it. Most SF film producers go to the horror or banal action drama of the sort made popular in 1930s magazines; knowingly or not, they take their cues from F. Orlin Tremaine when he was editor of *Astounding Stories*. Some, more sophisticated, go to "Modern" science fiction, as Gene Roddenberry did when *Star Trek* based most of its modes on something very much like what John

W. Campbell, Jr., did as editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* in the middle 1940s. (*Star Trek*, of course, sensibly omitted the "wiring-diagram" sub-genre Campbell also favored.) A few, such as Stanley Kubrick with *2001*, go to the modern form of the wiring-diagram story, spending fortunes on special effects which accumulate a limited impact as a sort of Poem of the Machine, à la some of the material in some of the contemporary science-fiction/science-fact magazines.

George Lucas is the man who filmed a *Planet* story.

While that has been self-evident to some of us all along, it requires a little explaining to some others.

Planet Stories was pulp, a raggy-edged, unabashed promulgator of Bug-Eyed-Monster covers and tales of derring-do on the spaceways. There were plenty of other magazines fitting that description in the 1940s, when *Planet* flourished. But none of them were quite like it. For one thing, it used to delight in pointing out that it wasn't a science-fiction magazine. It published something it called "science-adventure" stories, by which it meant adventure stories in which the heroes had scales and six legs, the railroads were rocket lines, and the six-shooters were rayguns.

All the heroes carried both a ray-gun and a sword; all the heroes had regular space suits but the ones worn by women were transparent, over brief pants and brass bras. Every planet had its hidden jungle temples or its lost desert shrines, and each of those had a scantily clad priestess with sinister motives but fetching ways. And wherever the brawny lads of the starways congregated, there

was a crowded, smoky little bar where enigmatic creatures engaged in secretive negotiations, and it could be worth your life to sit with your back to the door.

Oh, not all of the stories had all of these features all the time. But the ideal *Planet* story, as worked out by editor Malcolm Reiss and star writer Leigh Brackett, contained (A) a hero who was civilized in education, but native to some tradition that put him in touch with mystical forces; (B) an aristocratic heroine who was constantly being captured and often getting dressed down to the bare essentials; (C) exotic aliens and alien settings; (D) villains who could manipulate mysterious forces; and (E) faithful servants and sinister henchmen who could keep the plot stirred up by doing the things the leading characters couldn't do, such as dying, suffering crippling indispositions, and acting in necessary but demeaning ways, while also expressing utter loyalty to their masters.

All of this was hung on as straightforward a plot as possible; something straight out of Grimms' fairy tales was ideal. It was ideal because what the story had for sale was the local color and the exotic rationales. *Why* the hero arrived at the jungle shrine and *why* the villain was villainous were matters that had to be self-evident, just as the characters in fairy tales are uncomplicated archetypes or, if they once had much complexity, were long ago refined into archetypes by the human desire to have plain reasons for acting plainly.

Now, what made George Lucas actually create the story of *Star Wars* the way he created it, perhaps no one now can know. Lucas made a number of public statements at the time, once the public cared, and they involved

parallels with *Seven Samurai* and other Oriental martial legends. Perhaps that's exactly what sparked him; it would fit *Star Wars* and fit with what seems to have happened to the *STAR WARS* trilogy. But it's not what sparks an artist that's significant — it's what he does with the spark.

For some reason, although the Oriental influence is readily traceable in hindsight, what *Star Wars* strikingly appeared to be was a Leigh Brackett *Planet* story. Brackett herself, an educated and highly intelligent woman who had worked on films like *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*, rubbing elbows with some of the most sophisticated artists Hollywood had attracted in its heyday, had done a great deal of reading in Oriental as well as Occidental folklore, and had based a number of stories on Eastern mysticisms. So if Lucas got the Force from Akira Kurosawa and put it into his *Star Wars* during the pre-success days when hardly anyone cared about these ins and outs, that did nothing to make his film seem less like a Brackett story.

By the time *Star Wars* appeared, *Planet* had been expunged a long time, gone down with all flags flying in the face of free TV in the 1950s and the migration of pulp writing into the tube. When we saw its hallmark triumphantly resurrected on the screen, some of us went crazy with joy. Some of us who went on to think about it critically nevertheless saw the success of *Star Wars* as a vindication of the principle that the world loves a good, readily accessible junk story, even if it's that science-fiction stuff, and that the reason so many other producers had failed in the past was that they had cluttered up their work with self-conscious

sops to Big Thinking and Major Significance.

What the world wanted was one more story about flying the air mail over the Andes, one more adventure about the Legionnaires dying as they hold out in the last oasis, one more tale about the good lad who by natural aristocracy could become a Jedi knight, slay the evil Vader, and gain the hand of the princess or, failing the latter, the friendship and respect of Robin Hood and Little John.

Or so it seemed to me; and it seemed to me I was far from alone; and, as it so seemed to me, it seemed so simple: Lucas was a natural-born storyteller, his attitude toward SF was affectionate rather than either worshipful or condescending, God was in His Heaven and All was Right with the World.

Within this construct, a number of interesting licenses were granted to Lucas. The sound of explosions in the airless vacuum, for instance — a notorious source of hoots and catcalls from attendees at the works of lesser mortals — drew no jeers. We granted to Lucas the obvious truth that ninety per cent of his audiences would have been seriously baffled, and would have assumed something had gone wrong with the sound track. Similarly, when TIE-fighters howl by, we credit them with a source of "psychic howl." We know they don't actually make the noise. But they stand for things that make such noises and, out beyond the campfires, always have.

And I'll tell you another one; we didn't mind that the Princess Leia actually looked like the Homecoming Queen. We knew what she stood for. It changed throughout the movie, mind you; toward the end, Carrie Fisher and the Leia characterization

had done the difficult job of making us accept her for exactly what she was.

As *Star Wars* entered its climactic moments, we saw the fruits of an unobtrusively impressive acting job.

Fisher had succeeded in making us interested in her *as* the Homecoming Queen, and in making us see a certain spiciness in her nevertheless. This is not a secret to people who have had much contact with homecoming queens in real life, but it was a breakdown in a Hollywood archetype — as immortalized by, among others, Ms. Fisher's mother, Debbie — and it was a breakdown in a Brackett/*Planet* archetype. There may be something to all of this, and we will get back to it. Meanwhile, however, the effect was that Carrie Fisher had effectively played against type; that whereas in the beginning we had willingly forgiven her for not being up to specifications, at the end we wanted her for what she was; and what she was, you see, was exactly what the jungle priestess was, but nicer. And there may be something indicative about Lucas's casting choice there, too.

But, however all that was, we were going along with Lucas on everything he did. We knew that fighter craft in space couldn't actually fly the same sorts of pattern that are flown in atmosphere. We didn't care; we thought it was clever of him to have his space combat scenes modelled on footage of carrier aircraft flights, because it "made them look real."

Think about that. Did it make them look "real," or did it make them archetypal; reminiscent of adventures in other times and in other places far, far away from the nominal milieu of *STAR WARS*? And doesn't that mean . . . well, mightn't that mean that even we, even we SF fans,

were particularly moved by the parts of *Star Wars* that weren't science fiction or fantasy, or any other kind of SF, but were part of the good old stories?

What I'm saying is that the confusion set in early.

When *The Empire Strikes Back* appeared, the confusion in some quarters became considerable. *Why* did the story open on an ice planet? Why didn't Lando Calrissian have anything real to do? Was it because he was black and C-3PO already had the part of Step'n Fetchit? Why was he black for story purposes, as distinguished from promotional purposes; considering he was the *only* black, were we supposed to buy the proposition it was just a coincidence?

Empire did things no film by the creator of *Star Wars* would ever have done. It threw money in your face, and it hyped not what it said but how it had done what it showed you. It subordinated story to inside stuff, as if what we'd really wanted from going to the theater was a copy of *Hollywood Reporter*.

It bragged about the number and complexity of its special effects, as if it had fallen into the hands of executives no smarter than the ones who had bragged about the special effects in *Battlestar Galactica* and all the other expensive, ambitious failures with which *Star Wars*' wake was littered. It was so taken up with the visual accomplishment of the Yoda doll that it used a sound process most theaters couldn't make intelligible. And it sprang this quasi-Freudian business about Luke's father.

Now, if Lucas wanted to do a film about archetypal compulsions, that was certainly within his rights as the owner of the store. But it was not

artistically *necessary* as a follow-up to *Star Wars*. It was to all intents and purposes a brand-new development in the scenario, and it was no more necessary to the working-out even of the *Empire* series of events than it was necessary to have Lando be black. It seemed to be exactly the same sort of superfluous note, perhaps commendable and worthy in its own right, as a sociopolitical appurtenance to the abstract merits of the *STAR WARS* saga taken for a significant social document of our time. But none of that cuts any ice with the boys in the back balcony, where what counts is the story, the story, the *story*.

And yet. . . . Although *Empire* did not gross as well as *Star Wars* and although most pundits now freely acknowledge that the film has what *Time* called typical "second act problems," we poured into the theaters for *Jedi*. No holding back, no testing the water, no waiting for our neighbors to come home and tell us whether it was any good. Down to the theater we ran, bag, baggage, and appurtenance, money in our fists, and saw it, saw it, saw it just as soon as any decent human being could.

Why?

I can't tell you: I went because George Scithers asked me to, so I don't count; but I think that even if he hadn't, I'd have been there on the first or second day. And I couldn't have told you why.

And, having seen it, I came out frowning, went home, stared at the wall, and was about to start putting words on paper when other people who had seen it began pressing their opinions on me. And every one of them was puzzled and disappointed; high-voiced, upset, querulous. Not that many of them agreed with each other on precisely what had gone

wrong, and none of them seemed to have an adequate reason for the degree of vehemence they were expressing. But there was something seriously wrong. And although all these people were solidly members of the SF community, and thus by definition different from the typical *Jedi* audience member, there is abroad in the land a sense that though we all piled into the theaters, we are not necessarily ecstatic about what we felt there, and not overly happy about what we saw there. So I went to see it again.

What did we see?

We saw Carrie Fisher's navel, and who can be blamed if, in reflex, the appropriately sexed audience members took a certain intense interest in that, and in the brass bra. But in all of the motion pictures, and in all of the stills, I have yet to see a seductive look on Carrie Fisher's face, or the kind of simpering look that appeals to the other component in mankind.

What we do see is a carefully sustained neutral expression; a better-than-you-suspected actress, fully confident of her place in the arts, registering not "I'm not here with Jabba the Hutt," which would be one way to go about it, but "I'm not here in what's happening to George Lucas." And that, if so, is a devastating commentary.

We see Lando Calrissian still with nothing to do. They call him "General" Calrissian. What he does is fly the *Falcon*, under someone else's direct supervision. They call Han Solo "General Solo," and what he continues to do is play Robin Hood, but that, at least, is what he's been doing all along. Fine. So why did they call him a general, when he's a small-unit commander? Because if

they call Calrissian a general, they have to call Solo a general, and nobody had the guts not to call Calrissian a general.

We see Yoda in a reprise. He utters some unintelligible wisdoms, dies, and is apparently taken up bodily into heaven when the potentially corruptible flesh winks out of sight. Luke, *still* no farther along in his Jedi training than he was when he interrupted it in order to fly off in *Empire*, has to be content with Yoda's gasping out (A) that he doesn't need more training, which directly contradicts what Yoda and Kenobi were hand-wringing over when last seen together, and (B) that, oh yes, now that he's contradicted Yoda about that, he *really* doesn't need more training, and Leia is his sister, and a potential Jedi knight. So don't breathe a word of this to Darth.

Does Luke say, "How come Darth, with his Jedi intuition, didn't already realize this the last time he captured Leia?"? Does he ask why, if he himself was able to do ESP things with the Force long before he had anything much like training, Leia has never showed the slightest sign of it (probably because it would have been completely counter to the original Leia's character to display anything as unearthly as "female intuition")? Does he wonder why Kenobi never mentioned it to him? How does he know, later, that Kenobi never mentioned it to *Leia*? In fact, why doesn't he just cock a skeptical eye and say: "I dunno, Lucas, all of this sounds like a hasty afterthought to me"?

We see Darth Vader die, by which time he is a dead ringer for the wan, gentlemanly Sidney Carton figure in a score of English movies, gasping out his life's last breath for the good and the true things to which he has

returned at the last moment: Darth Vader redeemed; Darth Vader forgotten, cleansed, to return at the last arm in arm with a benignly smiling Kenobi and Yoda, granting their blessing and approval to the brave young children. (And isn't it fortunate Yoda had that fence post to sit on, so Kenobi and the ethereally reconstructed Darth don't have to stoop?)

But if he dies unmasked, and goes to heaven, how come *he* doesn't disincorporeate like Yoda did and Kenobi apparently did, and if he's been so damned redeemed, how come when Luke puts him on the pyre for his Viking funeral, he has him all dressed up like a black Cadillac again?

And you remember the John Williams score; martial and stirring, each major character with his or her theme, the whole thing brassy, blaring, and driving. So when poor Darth breathes his last, did you notice the plaintive harp plucking all by itself at the ethereal version of the Vader theme? Did you, by any chance, notice that when Han and Leia plight their troth — for the third or fourth time, and after that banal gambit about her loving Luke, to Han's noble confusion — when they stare into each other's eyes, the music comes up with that fruity Venusberg-like orchestration? Cheap films do that; cheap films that can afford the expense of using all the sure-fire audience-manipulating tricks. George Lucas of *Star Wars* would never do that, or fill the forest with bunny-rabbit Ewoks, or give them a victory song to sing that's right out of the similar scenes in *The Dark Crystal*, which was not an adventure story but a fairy tale.

Ah, you say, this ill-tempered far-fargo does not do right. This nit-

picking is no more than anyone could do to rip apart something to which an unaccountable but probably jealous dislike has been taken.

But that doesn't explain enough. No matter how biased or unreasonable some particular catalogue of faults might be, the objective evidence is that each succeeding film in the *STAR WARS* trilogy is not an amplification of its predecessor, but rather a departure from it; that the "second act troubles," if seen as troubles at all, mean that the first act was full of deliberate red herrings, in which case how do we know the third act isn't some sort of confection too?

What I think, for what it's worth, is that Lucas is *almost* a first-rate film artist. His values may be impaired, by an instance of the fairly common mistaken idea that once you've got their attention with a simple (cheap and unworthy) story, *now* you can tell 'em one that's really worthy of you. It may, on the other hand, be impaired by the notion that no one ever went broke underestimating the taste of the general public. But it is impaired.

Why did we all go see *Jedi*? Morbid curiosity, lying concealed since the partly subconscious disappointment of *Empire*? Probably not, though that's a charmingly Freudian notion. Probably because so many of us are not the audience for *Star Wars*; we are the audience that remembers being the *Star Wars* audience, plus the audience that was so young at the time it has changed in various pubescent ways since then, plus the audience for the hype.

The hype, remember, is what fills in so many of the details. So many of the specific names, the special backgrounds, and the transitions, never occur on the screen. They occur in the collateral comic books, the noveli-

zations, and in the interviews in which various insiders talk about things in the stories *as if* they had reached the release print.

The *STAR WARS* films that actually exist must by now be quite different from the films we now all believe exist. We have moved beyond the observations of our own and thus uncorroborated senses. We dwell in the comfort of the consensus created by the hype.

The thing is all so big, you see; so much a part not of our minds, but of our lives. When in the future we want to recall these days, and how we were, we will remember *Star Wars*.

Whatever and whoever George Lucas is — and I don't think he's really changed — it got away from him. Perhaps he always knew it would. The Empire is too big; perhaps he always knew he would wind up riding a wave with a roaring power of its own, perhaps a fear of that has been conditioning his work from its very beginnings. There's a point, however, beyond which we don't have to think too much about those ramifications, and that point arrives as we realize we're in the wave with him. There's no place left to stand and reach an objective measurement. It does make you wonder whether in George Lucas's mind there's some *other* project, even bigger, that justifies letting *STAR WARS* fall into the hands of surefire Hallmark-greeting-card emotional manipulations.

And that, of course, raises the question of what the next *STAR WARS* films might be like. It raises the specter that we'll again be busting down the doors to find out. Not to be entertained in the sense we used to use. The hype will have taken away

all the suspense before the films ever open. The hype will have supplied details that won't ever have to be actually shown. No, the entertainment will be the new sort of entertainment; the entertainment of watching George Lucas entertain us, all of us including the real, individual George Lucas behind the corporate, breathing George-Lucas facade.

It's a little bit like going to the Coliseum. After all, the lions getting the Christians, week after week, contains few opportunities for truly new events. So you begin to immerse yourself in the inside details — how the lions are caught, where the best lions come from, what the best lion-handlers do, what the best lion-handlers think of various world events, and all those other once-peripheral features that take on increasing weight and a sort of fascination in direct proportion to how boring the ostensible central event has become.

And all of this would hardly touch at all on anything of major importance to science fiction, if Lucas hadn't gone to Leigh Brackett for help on *The Empire Strikes Back*. It was, of course, only the polite thing to do. It might have been done in homage, it might have been done in gratitude, it might have been done because it seemed like a good way to link her name to *STAR WARS*. Whatever, it was done; Lucas went to Brackett with a rough breakdown of the events in *Empire*, and Leigh gave him back the first draft screen play that Lawrence Kasdan used to write the final shooting script.

It was the last piece of work Leigh did, in a long, good career that had wedded Hollywood and *Planet Stories*. Her best friend, confidant, and husband, Edmond Hamilton, had

died recently, and she herself knew she was dying. She was rounding off a life uncommonly well lived. It's a life in which you and I have shared, to our enrichment, even if you never consciously read anything by Leigh Brackett in your life.

Toward the end, she told George Scithers she was having a lot of fun working with Lucas. I'll bet she was; she loved work.

She loved being a disciplined professional. Lucas handed her the relevant pages from his famous notebook, and she fleshed them out to his satisfaction. Then Lucas went to Kasdan for the final draft of the script; Lucas picked a director; Lucas went to the various special-effects people and places, the various sound stages and locations; and away they went. For *Jedi* — known for years as the *The Revenge of the Jedi*, implying a far different story from the wan thing we get in *Return* — Lucas got another director. They say he's the one who put Leia in the bra. They say George Lucas's now divorced wife, the editor, made the difference in *Star Wars*. They say George Lucas says he now won't ever make the other six pictures he's been talking about for six years, but that's nonsense; too many people want the money from the six pictures, and they'll make however many of them they can before the money stops.

Dis-hype. Now we are in the hype that looks like counterhype, and no one can find the core of truth.

I am left to wonder about Leigh Brackett, because that's a way of wondering about those of us who were in SF before *Star Wars* and might want to still have an SF after *Star Wars*.

The Big Thinks in *Empire* . . . perfectly legitimate subthemes for an

adventure story, but skewing an adventure story into ungainly postures if brought to the foreground . . . who did that? Why is *Empire* not as much of a Brackett story as *Star Wars*, thus apparently foredooming *Jedi*; and why was Brackett nevertheless finding fun in working on it?

Lucas, for instance, is brilliant, attractively rebellious, and was enormously energetic — qualities that must have been magnetically attractive to a Hollywood veteran who had seen, so many times, what Hollywood normally offers in the place of George Lucas. If Lucas also had a track record of not really knowing where he wanted to be with what he was doing, was that as important as the fact that he would run a project down all the way to the end, sparing no detail of quality as he saw quality in terms of that particular project?

Brackett, for instance — was the artist of *The Big Sleep*, the archetype of *Planet Stories*, so intimidating to approach that Lucas felt he had to show artistic credentials? Granting the Freudian subthemes were in the notebooks all along, as subthemes they make perfectly good sense. And Brackett's stories work, in part, because just under the hurly-burly, never spoken but always there, are the linked images and woven allusions that give an action drama relevance and emotional impact. In talking about the story to her, did Lucas emphasize them so much that they moved out of the background into the foreground, because it seemed ridiculous for two grown artists to just talk about the running and jumping portions?

There's no doubt in my mind Lucas conveyed the Big Think attitude to Kasdan after leaving Brackett, but the question is, what generated it, to what extent of emphasis, in the rapport between Brackett and Lucas? In the rapport between Lucas and Brackett-standing-for-us?

Good thinking, earnest thinking about important human questions, is one of the most important reasons there is a fiction at all. The fact that it can be done better, in some ways, by speculative fiction, is the reason why there is an SF in addition to the other sorts of fiction. And, just as the seriously motivated story is a bore and a drag without human interaction to give it point, so the ostensible story of pure entertainment reduces itself to senseless headbanging without some underlying detectable relevance to the general human condition. None of that has anything to do with Big Thoughts, which are spurious, and which we ought to know better than to promulgate. Surely Leigh Brackett knew better. Surely Leigh Brackett could resist the avalanche wave; and if she could, we can, surely.

I want to be assured of that. I want to know that even more than I want to know how come Luke can plummet down a tube at the end of *Empire* and come out basically O.K., but the Emperor, for all his snap-pings and cracklings, can fall down a basically similar tube in *Jedi* and be dead. He is dead, we are assured by the dead Darth Vader; as dead as Thomas Mitchell flying into a cloud of condors in *Only Angels Have Wings*, as dead as *Planet Stories*.



AFTERNOON AT SCHRAFFT'S

by Gardner Dozois, Jack Dann, & Michael Swanwick

art: George Barr



The authors tell us that "Afternoon at Schrafft's" began at a dinner party at Michael Swanwick's house. "After dinner, we retired to the library for cordials, and suddenly Michael sat down at the typewriter and insisted that we produce a story right now." The next thing they knew, Gardner Dozois and Jack Dann were pacing back and forth across the room, acting out the story complete with dialogue. "After an hour or two of this, we had the skeleton of a story, which we all reworked and polished. You might watch those spells, though: some of them are real." Or so they say.

The wizard sat alone at a table in Schrafft's, eating a tuna sandwich on rye. He finished off the last bite of his sandwich, sat back, and licked a spot of mayonnaise off his thumb. There was an ozone crackle in the air, and his familiar, a large brindle cat, materialized in the chair opposite him.

The cat coldly eyed the wizard's empty plate. "And where, may I ask, is my share?" he demanded.

The wizard coughed in embarrassment.

"You mean you didn't even leave me a crumb, is that it?"

The wizard shrugged and looked uncomfortable. "There's still a pickle left," he suggested.

The cat was not mollified.

"Or some chips. Have some potato chips."

"Feh," sneered the cat. "Potato chips I didn't want. What I *wanted* was a piece of your sandwich, Mister Inconsiderate."

"Listen, aggravation I don't need from you. Don't make such a big deal — it's only a *tuna fish sandwich*. So who cares!"

"So who *cares*?" the cat spat. "So *I* care, that's who. Listen, it's not just the sandwich. It's everything! It's your *attitude*."

"Don't talk to *me* about *my* attitude —"

"Somebody should. You think you're *so* hot. Mister Big Deal! The big-time Wizard!" The cat sneered at him. "Hah! You need me more than I need you, believe me, Mister Oh-I'm-So-Wonderful!"

"Don't make me laugh," the wizard said.

"You couldn't get along without me, and you know it!"

"I'm laughing," the wizard said. "It's such a funny joke you're making, look at me, I'm laughing. Hah. Hah. Hah."

The cat fluffed itself up, enraged. "Without me, you couldn't even get through the day. What an ingrate! You refuse to admit just how much you really need me. Why, without me, you couldn't even —" The cat paused, casting about for an example, and his gaze fell on the check. "Without me, you couldn't even pay the *check*."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. Even something as simple as *that*, you couldn't do it by yourself. You couldn't handle it."

"Sure I could. Don't get too big for your britches. Stuff like this I was handling before *you* were even weaned, bubbie, let *alone* housebroken. So don't puff yourself up."

The cat sneered at him again. "Okay, so go ahead! Show me! Do it!"

"Do what?" said the wizard, after a pause, a trace of uneasiness coming into his voice.

"Pay the check. Take care of it yourself."

"All right," the wizard said. "All right, then, I will!"

"So go ahead already. I'm watching. This ought to be good." The cat

smiled nastily and faded away, slowly disappearing line by line — the Cheshire cat was one of his heroes, and this was a favorite trick, although for originality's sake he left his nose behind instead of his grin. The nose hung inscrutably in midair, like a small black-rubber UFO. Occasionally it would give a sardonic twitch.

The wizard sighed, and sat staring morosely down at the check. Then, knowing in advance that it would be useless, he pulled out his battered old change-purse and peered inside: nothing, except for some lint, the tiny polished skull of a bat, and a ticket-stub from the 1876 Centennial Exposition. The wizard never carried money — ordinarily, he'd have just told the cat to conjure up whatever funds were necessary, an exercise so simple and trivial that it was beneath his dignity as a Mage even to consider bothering with it himself. That was what familiars were *for*, to have tasks like that delegated to them. Now, though. . . .

"Well?" the cat's voice drawled. "So, I'm waiting. . . ."

"All right, all right, big shot," the wizard said. "I can handle this, don't worry yourself."

"I'm not worried — I'm *waiting*."

"All right already." Mumbling to himself, the wizard began to work out the elements of the spell. It was a very *small* magic, after all. Still . . . He hesitated, drumming his fingers on the table. . . . Still, he hadn't had to do anything like this for himself for years, and his memory wasn't what it used to be. . . . Better ease his hand in slowly, try a still smaller magic first. Practice. Let's see now. . . . He muttered a few words in a hissing sibilant tongue, sketched a close pattern in the air, and then rested his forefinger on the rim of his empty coffee cup. The cup filled with coffee, as though his finger was a spigot. He grunted in satisfaction, and then took a sip of his coffee. It was weak and yellow, and tasted faintly of turpentine. So far, so good, he thought. . . .

Across the table, the nose sniffed disdainfully.

The wizard ignored it. *Now* for the real thing. He loosened his tie and white starched collar and drew the pentagram of harmony, the *Sephiroth*, using salt from the shaker, which was also the secret symbol for the fifth element of the pentagram, the *akasha*, or ether. He made do with a glass of water, catsup, mustard, and toothpicks to represent the four elements and the worlds of Emanation, Creation, Formation, and Action. He felt cheap and vulgar using such substitutes, but what else could he do?

Now . . . he thought, that *is* the pentagram of harmony . . . isn't it? For an instant he was uncertain. Well, it's close enough. . . .

He tugged back his cuffs, leaving his wrists free to make the proper passes over the pentagram. Now . . . what was the spell to make money? It was either the first or the second Enochian Key . . . *that* much he did remember. It must be the second key, and that went . . . : "*Piamoel od Vuoan!*" No, no, that wasn't it. Was it "*Giras ta nazodapesad Roray I?*"

That *must* be it.

The wizard said the words and softly clapped his hands together . . . and nothing seemed to happen.

For an instant there was no noise, not even a breath. It was as if he was hovering, disembodied, between the worlds of emanation.

There was a slow shift in his equilibrium, like a wheel revolving ponderously in darkness.

But magic doesn't just disappear, he told himself querulously — it has to go *somewhere*.

As if from the other side of the world, the wizard heard the soft voice of his familiar, so faint and far away that he could barely make it out. What was it saying?

"Putz," the cat whispered, "you used the Pentagram of Chaos, the *Qliphoth*."

And suddenly, as if he really had been turned upside-down for a while, the wizard felt everything right itself. He was sitting at a table in Schrafft's, and there was the usual din of people talking and shouting and pushing and complaining.

But something was odd, something was wrong. Even as he watched, the table splintered and flew to flinders before him; and his chair creaked and groaned and swayed like a high-masted ship in a strong wind, and then broke, dumping him heavily to the floor. The room shook, and the floor cracked and starred beneath him.

What was wrong? What aethers and spheres had he roiled and foiled with his misspoken magicks? Why did he feel so *strange*? Then he saw himself in the goldflecked smoked-glass mirrors that lined the room between rococo plaster pillars, and the reflection told him the terrible truth.

He had turned himself into some kind of giant lizard. A dinosaur. Actually, as dinosaurs go, he was rather small. He weighed about eight hundred pounds and was eleven feet long — a *Pachycephalosaurus*, a horn-headed, pig-snouted herbivore that was in its prime in the Upper Cretaceous. But for Schrafft's, at lunch time — big enough. He clicked his stubby tusks and tried to say "Gevalt!" as he shook his head ruefully. Before he could stop the motion, his head smashed into the wooden booth partition, causing it to shudder and crack.

Across from him, two eyes appeared, floating to either side of the hovering black nose. Slowly, solemnly, one eye winked. Then — slowly and very sinisterly — eyes and nose faded away and were gone.

That was a bad sign, the wizard thought. He huddled glumly against the wall. Maybe nobody will notice, he thought. His tail twitched nervously, splintering the booth behind him. The occupants of the booth leaped up, screaming, and fled the restaurant in terror. Out-of-towners, the wizard thought. Everyone else was eating and talking as usual, paying

no attention, although the waiter *was* eying him somewhat sourly.

As he maneuvered clumsily away from the wall, pieces of wood crunching underfoot, the waiter came up to him and stood there making little tscking noises of disapproval. "Look, mister," the waiter said. "You're going to have to pay up and go. You're creating a disturbance —" The wizard opened his mouth to utter a mild remonstrance, but what came out instead was a thunderous roaring belch, grindingly deep and loud enough to rattle your bones, the sort of noise that might be produced by having someone stand on the bass keys of a giant Wurlitzer. Even the wizard could smell the fermenting, rotting-egg, bubbling-prehistoric-swamp stink of sulphur that his belch had released, and he winced in embarrassment. "I'm sorry," the wizard said, enunciating with difficulty through the huge, sloppy mouth. "It's the tuna fish. I know I shouldn't eat it, it always gives me gas, but —" But the waiter no longer seemed to be listening — he had gone pale, and now he turned abruptly around without a word and walked away, ignoring as he passed the querulous demands for coffee refills from the people two tables away, marching in a straight line through the restaurant and right out into the street.

The wizard sighed, a gusty, twanging noise like a cello being squeezed flat in a winepress. Time — and *past* time — to work an obviation spell. So, then. Forgetting that he was a dinosaur, the wizard hurriedly tried to redraw the pentagram, but he couldn't pick up the salt, which was in a small pile around the broken glass shaker. And everything else he would need for the spell was buried under the debris of the table.

"Not doing so hot now, Mister Big Shot, are you?" a voice said, rather smugly.

"All right, all right, give me a minute, will you?" said the wizard, a difficult thing to say when your voice croaked like a gigantic frog's — it was hard to be a dinosaur and talk. But the wizard still had his pride. "You don't make soup in a second," he said. Then he began thinking feverishly. He didn't really *need* the elements and representations of the four worlds and the pentagram of kabbalistic squares, not for an obviation spell; although, of course, things would be much more elegant *with* them. He *could* work the obviation spell by words alone — *if* he could remember the words. He needed something from the Eighteenth Path, that which connects *Binah* and *Geburah*, the House of Influence. Let's see, he thought, "*E pluribus unum*." No, no. . . . Could it be "*Micaoli beranusaji UK?*" No, that was a pharmacological spell. . . . But, yes, of *course*, this was it, and he began to chant "*Tstske, tsstskeleh, tchotchike, tchotchkeleh, trayf, Qu-a-a-on!*"

That should do it.

But nothing happened. Again! The wizard tried to frown, but hadn't the face for it. "Nothing happened," he complained.

The cat's head materialized in midair. "That's what *you* think. As a

matter of fact, all the quiches at Maxim's just turned into frogs. Great big ones," he added maliciously. "Great big green *slimy* ones."

The wizard dipped his great head humbly. "All right," he grumbled. "Enough is enough. I give up. I admit defeat. I was wrong. From now on, I promise, I'll save you a bite of every sandwich I ever order."

The cat appeared fully for a moment, swishing its tail thoughtfully back and forth. "You do know, don't you, that I prefer the part in the middle, without the crust. . . ?"

"I'll never give you the crust, always from the middle —"

The waiter had come back into the restaurant, towing a policeman behind him, and was now pointing an indignant finger toward the wizard. The policeman began to slouch slowly toward them, looking bored and sullen and mean.

"I mean, it's not really the sandwich, you know," the cat said.

"I know, I know," the wizard mumbled.

"I get insecure too, like everyone else. I need to know that I'm wanted. It's the *thought* that counts, knowing that you're thinking about me, that you want me around —"

"All right, all right!" the wizard snapped irritably. Then he sighed again, and (with what would have been a gesture of final surrender if he'd had hands to spread) said "So, okay, I want you around." He softened, and said almost shyly, "I *do*, you know." "I know," the cat said. They stared at each other with affection for a moment, and then the cat said, "For making money, it's the new moon blessing, "*Steyohn, v's-keyah-lahnough* —"

"Money I don't need anymore," the wizard said grumpily. "Money it's gone beyond. Straighten out all of *this* —" gesturing with his pig-like snout at his — feh! — scaly green body.

"Not to worry. The *proper* obviation spell is that one you worked out during the Council of Trent, remember?"

The cat hissed out the words. Once again the wheel rotated slowly in darkness.

And then, the wizard was sitting on the floor, in possession of his own spindly limbs again. Arthritically, he levered himself to his feet.

The cat watched him get up, saying smugly, "And as a bonus, I even put money in your purse, not bad, huh? I told —" And then the cat fell silent, staring off beyond the wizard's shoulder. The wizard looked around.

Everyone *else* in Schrafft's had turned into dinosaurs.

All around them were dinosaurs, dinosaurs in every possible variety, dinosaurs great and small, four-footed and two-footed, horned and scaled and armor-plated, striped and speckled and piebald, all busily eating lunch, hissing and grunting and belching and slurping, huge jaws chewing noisily, great fangs flashing and clashing, razor-sharp talons clicking

on tile. The din was horrendous. The policeman had turned into some sort of giant spiky armadillo, and was contentedly munching up the baseboard. In one corner, two nattily-pinstriped allosaurs were fighting over the check, tearing huge bloody pieces out of each other. It was impossible to recognize the waiter.

The cat stared at the wizard.

The wizard stared at the cat.

The cat shrugged.

After a moment, the wizard shrugged too.

They both sighed.

"Lunch tomorrow?" the wizard asked, and the cat said, "Suits me."

Behind them, one of the triceratops finished off its second egg cream, and made a rattling noise with the straw.

The wizard left the money for the check near the cash register, and added a substantial tip.

They went out of the restaurant together, out into the watery city sunshine, and strolled away down the busy street through the fine mild airs of spring. ☾



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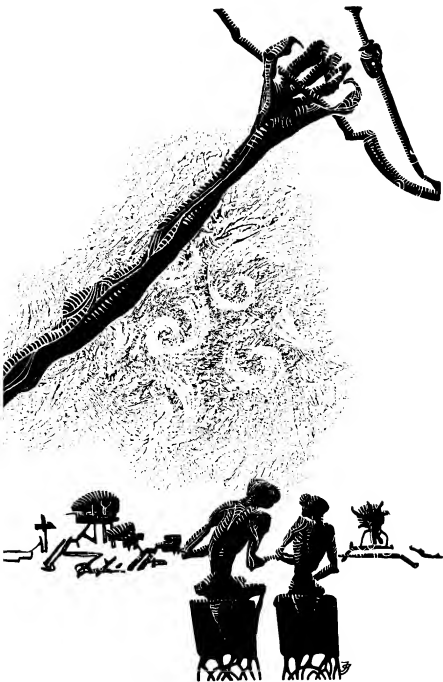
GATEWAY III —

Where the Heechee Feared To Go

by Frederik Pohl

Art: Jack Gaughan





I don't know if I can honestly say I'm a friend of Robinette Broadhead's (since I am only a simple data-retrieval system, called by him "Albert Einstein"), but I am surely a friend **to** him. I worry about him. You might not think a computer program could do anything so human as to worry, but I'm a special program — more special than ever since Robin's wife, Essie, rebuilt me to be as nearly exact a copy of the real (but unfortunately dead) Albert Einstein as ever passed the Turing test. (That is, if you didn't look at me you couldn't tell me from the real thing. And of course you couldn't look at me, because how can you see a mere program?) Mrs. Broadhead didn't do it all on her own. She had help from some of the technology left around the Galaxy by that long-vanished race of star travelers, the Heechee. Heechee explorers had devised ways of trapping the minds and memories of dead people — Heechee people to begin with, of course, but the process could be made to work on human beings — in machine storage, very like myself. Mrs. Broadhead adapted their techniques — and here I am! The real Albert Einstein was compassionate . . . ergo, so am I.

And my compassion goes largely to Robin. You might not think he needs much, rich and powerful as he is, but he suffers from two agonies machine intelligences are generally spared. One is the pain of growing old. The other, a lost love. Her name was Celle-Klara Moynlin. Like Robin, she dared explore the universe in those treacherous old Heechee ships that killed or maimed or marooned half their crews. Klara was lucky enough only to be marooned, but it was inside a black hole — and Robin (with some reason) had always felt it might have been his fault.

There were plenty of other troubles, to be sure, but they were the whole world's troubles. The population of Earth was bursting. The starving peoples, now that Heechee technology was making a paradise for so many, were no longer content to starve. There were simply too many of them to be lifted off the Earth to find happier homes elsewhere — a powerful conflict that wound up in brushfire wars and terrorism.

Well. As one of your human writers has said, it was the best of times and it was the worst of times, but then what time isn't? But Robin Broadhead took it hard.

This is not my story to tell. It is Robin's, and I am advised by a

pesky subset within my program (if I were really human it could be called my conscience) to let him tell it. It involves not only Robin but certain of his friends. As you will see, he knows a great deal about them (largely because I have helped him know). One friend was Audee Walthers, a pilot on one of the worlds the Heechee had put within men's reach, called Peggys Planet. Another . . . no, friend is too strong a word: a person whose life intersected Robin's was the strange and generally speaking quite nasty young man named Wan, who had been brought up on a Heechee habitat in space with no human contact — much less so useful a program as myself. You would expect him to be what is called a sociopath. He was. But also resourceful and plausible. The ship in which he flitted about the Galaxy was not his by right, much less the very special and alarming devices on it. And now he had for company — well, not really company: a resource, a servant — Audee's young wife Dolly.

Poor Dolly! A reasonably decent person, really, but too attached to her dreams of the good life. And Wan was **so** convincing — just long enough. But really she need not have left Audee broke and with no choice but to work his way back to Earth. Yet from such seeds — you see, Audee found solace with a ship's officer, Janie Yee-xing, and then they played just long enough with a dangerous gadget, the Telepathic Psychokinetic Transceiver, to touch the mind of something not human. And to get busted for playing with it. But the news of their find, Audee thought, would be worth a great deal to Robin. Well and good — but they forgot that the TPT worked both ways.

Which brings me to a friend-to-be whose story this also is: Captain. And this one is an actual Heechee! Half a million years ago, scared out of their wits by something they had discovered, the Heechee had retreated into an immense black hole in the center of the Galaxy, emerging from time to time to see how — and what — their protégés were doing. Now Captain discovered that the human race had done far better in learning the use of Heechee artifacts than anyone had guessed. But what they had not learned, and might — so very soon! — learn the hard way, hard on men and Heechee alike: this caused Captain and his crew the utmost alarm and despondency.

Yes, conscience! You're a useful little subset of me, but you can stop nagging. I will now let Robin continue his story.

* * *



There
he
stood,

this fellow with a face like a tan avocado, blocking my way. I identified the expression before I recognized the face. The expression was obstinacy, irritation, fatigue. The face that displayed them belonged to Audee Walthers, Jr., who (my secretarial program had not failed to tell me) had been trying to get in touch with me for several days. "Hello, Audee," I said, really very cordially, shaking his hand and nodding to the pretty Oriental-looking young woman beside him, "it's great to see you again! Are you staying at this hotel? Wonderful! Listen, I've got to run, but let's have dinner — set it up with the concierge, will you? I'll be back in a couple of hours." And I smiled at him, and smiled at the young woman, and left them standing there.

Now, I don't pretend that was really good manners, but as it happens I actually was in a hurry, and besides my gut was giving me fits. I put Essie in a cab going one way, and caught another to take me to the court. Of course, if I had known then what he was waiting to tell me, I might have been more forthcoming with Walthers. But I didn't know what I was walking away from.

Or what I was walking toward, for that matter.

For the last little bit I actually did walk, because traffic was more than normally snarled. There was a parade getting ready to march, as well as the normal congestion around the International Palace of Justice. The Palace is a forty-story skyscraper, sunk on caissons into the soapy soil of Rotterdam. On the outside it dominates half the city. On the inside it's all scarlet drapes and one-way glass, the very model of a modern international tribunal. It is not a place where you go to plead to a parking ticket.

I pushed my way into the hearing room. It was crowded. It was always crowded, because there were celebrities to be seen at the hearings. In my vanity I had thought I was one of them, and I expected heads to turn when I came in. No heads. No turning. Everybody was watching half a dozen skinny, bearded persons in dashikis and sandals, sitting in a corral

at the plaintiffs' end of the room, drinking Cokes and giggling among themselves. The Old Ones. You didn't see them every day. I gawked at them like everybody else, until there was a touch on my arm and I turned to see Maitre Ijsinger, my flesh-and-blood lawyer, gazing reprovingly at me. "You are late, Mijnheer Broadhead," he whispered. "The Court will have noticed your absence."

The Heechee, thinking that the australopithecines they discovered when they first visited the Earth would ultimately evolve a technological civilization, decided to preserve a colony of them in a sort of zoo. Their descendants were "the Old Ones." Of course, that was a wrong guess on the part of the Heechee. Australopithecus never achieved intelligence, only extinction. It was a sobering reflection for human beings to realize that the so-called "Heechee Heaven," later rechristened the **S. Ya. Broadhead** — far the largest and most sophisticated starship the human race had ever seen — was in fact only a sort of monkey cage.

Since the Court was busy whispering and arguing among themselves over, I gathered, the question of whether the diary of the first prospector to locate a Heechee tunnel on Venus should be admitted as evidence, I doubted that. But you don't pay a lawyer as much as I was paying Maitre Ijsinger to argue with him.

Of course, there was no *legal* reason for me to pay him at all. As much as the case was about anything, it was about a motion on the part of the Empire of Japan to dissolve the Gateway Corporation. I came into it, as major stockholder in the *S. Ya.*'s charter business, because the Bolivians had brought suit to have the charter revoked on the grounds that the financing of the colonists amounted to a "return to slavery." The colonists were called indentured servants; and I, among others, had been called a wicked exploiter of human misery. What were the Old Ones doing there? Why, they were parties at interest, too, because they claimed that the *S. Ya.* was their property — they and their ancestors had lived there for hundreds of thousands of years. Their position in the court was a little complicated. They were wards of the government of Tanzania, because that's where their ancestral Earth home had been decreed to be, but Tanzania wasn't represented in the courtroom. Tanzania was boycotting the Palace of Justice because of an unfavorable decision over their sea-bottom missiles the year before, so its affairs were being handled by Paraguay — who were actually taking an interest mostly because of a

border dispute with Brazil, which in turn was present as host to the headquarters of the Gateway Corp. You follow all this? Well, I didn't, but that was why I hired Maitre Ijsinger.

If I let myself get personally involved in every lousy multi-million-dollar lawsuit I'd spend all my time in court. However, there were special reasons for being here. I saw one of them, half asleep, on a leather chair near the Old Ones. "I think I'll see if Joe Kwiatkowski wants a cup of coffee," I told Ijsinger.

Kwiatkowski was a Pole, representing the East Europe Economic Community, and one of the plaintiffs in the case. Ijsinger turned pale. "He's an *adversary*!" he hissed.

"He's also an old friend," I told him, exaggerating the facts of the case only slightly — he had been a Gateway prospector, too, and we'd had drinks over old times before.

"There are no friends in a court action of this magnitude," Ijsinger informed me, but I only smiled at him, and leaned forward to hiss at Kwiatkowski, who came along willingly enough once he was awake.

"I should not be here with you, Robin," he rumbled, once we were in my fifteenth-floor suite. "Especially for coffee! Don't you got something to put in it?"

Well, I had — slivovitz, and from his favorite Cracow distillery, too. And Kampuchean cigars, the brand he liked, and salt herring and biscuits to go with them all.

The Court was built over a little canal off the Maas River, and you could smell the water. Because I had managed to get a window open, you could hear the boats going through under the building's arch, and traffic from the tunnel under the Maas a quarter-kilometer away. I opened the window a little wider because of Kwiatkowski's cigar, and saw the flags and bands in the side streets. "What are they parading for today?" I asked.

He brushed the question aside. "Because armies like parades," he grunted. "Now, no fooling around, Robin. I know what you want and it is impossible."

"What I want," I said, "is for the Eeek to help wipe out the terrorists with the spaceship, which is obviously in the interest of everybody. You tell me that's impossible. Fine, I accept that; but *why* is it impossible?"

"Because you know nothing of politics. You think the E.E.E.C. can go to the Paraguayans and say, 'Listen, go and make a deal with Brazil, say you will be more flexible on this border dispute if they will pool their information with the Americans so the terrorist spaceship can be trapped.' "

"Yes," I said, "that is exactly what I think."

"And you are wrong. They will not listen."

"The Eeek," I said patiently, having been well briefed for this purpose

by my data-retrieval system, Albert, "is Paraguay's biggest trading partner. If you whistle they jump."

"In most cases, yes. In this case, no. The key to the situation is the Republic of Kampuchea. They have with Paraguay private arrangements. About these I will say nothing, except that they have been approved at the highest level. More coffee," he added, holding out his cup, "and this time, please, not so much coffee in it."

I did not have to ask Kwiatkowski what the "private arrangements" were. All the "private arrangements" governments were making with each other these days were military, and if I had not been sweating about the terrorists I would have been sweating about the crazy way the world's duly ordained governments were behaving. But one thing at a time.

So, on Albert's advice, I got a lawyer from Malaysia into my private parlor next, and after her a missionary from Canada, and then a general in the Albanian Air Force, and for each one I had some bait to dangle. Albert told me what levers to pull and what glass beads to offer the natives — an extra allotment of colonization passages here, a "charitable" contribution there. Sometimes all it took was a smile. Rotterdam was the place to do it, because ever since the Palace was moved from the Hague, the Hague having been pretty well messed up in the troubles the last time some joker was fooling with a TPT, you could find anyone you wanted in Rotterdam. All kinds of people. All colors, all sexes, in all kinds of costumes from Ecuadorian lawyers in miniskirts to Marshall Islands thermal-energy barons in sarongs and shark's-teeth necklaces. Whether I was making progress or not was hard to say, but at half past twelve, my belly telling me that it was going to hurt in a serious way if I didn't put some food in it, I knocked off for the morning. I thought longingly of our nice quiet hotel suite with a nice lukewarm steak from room service and my shoes off, but I had promised to meet Essie at her place of business. So I told Albert to prepare an estimate of what I had accomplished, and recommendations about what I should do next, and fought my way to a cab.

You can't miss one of Essie's fast-food franchises. The glowing blue Heechee-metal arches are in just about every country of the world. As The Boss she had a roped-off section on the balcony reserved for us, and she met me coming up the stairs with a kiss, a frown, and a dilemma. "Robin! Listen! They want here to serve mayonnaise with the french-fries. Should I allow?"

I kissed her back, but I was peering over her shoulder to see what ungodly messes were being set out on our tables. "That's really up to you," I told her.

"Yes, of course, is up to me. But is important, Robin! Have taken great care in meticulous duplication of true pommes-frites, you know. Now mayonnaise?" Then she stepped back and gave me a more thorough look,

and her expression changed. "So tired! So many lines in the face! Robin, how are you feeling?"

I gave her my most charming smile. "Just hungry, my dear," I cried, and gazed with deceitful enthusiasm at the plates before me. "Say! That looks good, what is it, a taco?"

"Is chapatti," she said with pride. "Taco is over there. Also blini. See how you like, then." So, of course, I had to taste them all, and it was not at all what my belly had asked for. The taco; the chapatti; the rice-balls with sour fish sauce; the stuff that tasted, more than anything else, like boiled barley. They were not any of them my cup of tea. But they were all edible.

They were also all gifts of the Heechee. Most of living tissue, including yours and mine, is made up of just four elements: carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen — C H O N — chon-food. Since that is also what the gases that comprise the best part of a comet are made of, they built their Food Factory out in the Oort cloud, where our sun's comets hang waiting for a star to shake them loose and send them in to be pretty in our sky.

CHON isn't all of it. You need a few other elements. Sulfur's the most important, maybe, then perhaps sodium, magnesium, zinc, phosphorus, chlorine, potassium, calcium — not to mention the odd dash of cobalt to make vitamin B-12, chromium for glucose tolerance, iodine for the thyroid, and lithium, fluorine, arsenic, selenium, molybdenum, cadmium, and tin for the Hell of it. The others will show up as contaminants whether you want them or not. So Essie's food chemists cooked up batches of sugar and spice and everything nice and produced food for everybody — not only what would keep them alive, but pretty much what they wanted to eat, wherefore the chapattis and the rice balls. You can make anything out of chon-food if you stir it up right. Among the other things Essie was making out of it was a lot of money, and that turned out to be a game she delighted to play.

So when I finally settled down with something my stomach didn't resist — it looked like a hamburger and tasted like an avocado salad with bacon bits in it, and Essie had named it the Big Chon — Essie was up and down every minute. Checking the temperature of the infra-red warming lights, looking for grease under the dishwashing machines, tasting the desserts, raising Hell because the milkshakes were too thin.

I moved to the second-floor window to look out at the parade. It was coming straight down Weena, ten abreast, with bands and shouting and placards. Nuisance. Maybe worse than a nuisance. Across the street, in front of the station, there was a scuffle, with cops and placards, re-armers against pacifists. You couldn't tell which was which from the way they clubbed each other with the placards; and Essie, rejoining me and picking up her own Big Chon, glanced at them and shook her head. "How's sandwich?" she demanded.

"Fine," I said, with my mouth full of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen, plus trace elements. She gave me a speak-louder look. "I said it's *fine*," I amplified.

"I couldn't hear you with all that noise," she complained, licking her lips — she liked what she sold.

I jerked my head toward the parade. "I don't know if this is so good," I said.

"I think not," she agreed, looking with distaste at a company of what I think they call Zouaves — anyway, dark-skinned marchers in uniform. I couldn't see their national patches, but each one of them was carrying a rapid-fire shoulder weapon and playing tricks with it: spinning them around, bouncing the buttplates against the pavement and making them spring back into their hands, all without breaking stride.

"Maybe we'd better start back to the court," I said.

"Have forgotten my programs!" she cried. And she dashed back to where she had left her data-fans.

I ambled to the door and waited for her, my eyes on the parade. It was quite disgusting! There were actual weapons going by, anti-aircraft missile launchers and armored vehicles; and behind a bagpipe band was a company of the Tommygun twirlers. I felt the door move behind me and stepped aside out of the way just as Essie pushed it open. "I found, Robin," she said, smiling and holding the thick sheaf of fans up as I turned toward her.

And something like a wasp snarled past my left ear.

There are no wasps in Rotterdam. Then I saw Essie falling backward, and the door closing on her. It was not a wasp. It was a gunshot. One of those twirled weapons had held a live charge, and it had gone off.

I nearly lost Essie once before. It was a long time ago, but I hadn't forgotten. All that old woe welled up as fresh as yesterday as I pulled the stupid door out of the way and bent over her. She was lying on her back, with the tied sheaf of data fans over her face, and as I lifted it away I saw that although her face was bloody her eyes were wide open and looking at me.

"Hey, Rob!" she said, her voice puzzled. "You punch me?"

"Hell, no! What would I punch you for?" One of the counter girls came rushing with a wad of paper napkins. I grabbed them away from her and pointed to the red and white striped electrovan with the words *Poliklinische centrum* stenciled on its side, idling at an intersection because of the parade. "You! Get that ambulance over here! And get the cops too, while you're at it!"

Essie sat up, pushing my arm away as cops and counter attendants swarmed around us. "Why ambulance, Robin?" she asked reasonably. "Is only a bloody nose, look!" And indeed that was all there was. It had been a bullet, all right, but it had hit the sheaf of fans and stayed there.

"My programs!" Essie wailed, tugging against the policeman who wanted them to extract the bullet for evidence. But they were ruined anyway. And so was my day.

While Essie and I were having our little brush with destiny, Audee Walthers was taking his friend sightseeing around the town of Rotterdam. He had been sweating as he left me; the presence of a lot of money does that to people. The absence of money took most of the joy out of Rotterdam for Walthers and Yee-xing. Still, to Walthers, the hayseeds of Peggys Planet still in his hair, and to Yee-xing, rarely away from the S. Ya. and the immediate vicinity of the launch loops, Rotterdam was a metropolis. They couldn't afford to buy anything, but at least they could look in the windows. At least Broadhead had agreed to see them, Walthers kept telling himself; but when he allowed himself to think it with some satisfaction, the darker side of Walthers responded with savage contempt: Broadhead had *said* he would see them. But he sure-hell hadn't seemed very anxious about it. . . .

"Why am I sweating?" he asked out loud.

Yee-xing slipped her arm through his for moral support, "It will be all right," she replied indirectly, "one way or another." Audee Walthers looked down at her gratefully. Walthers was not particularly tall, but Janie Yee-xing was tiny, all of her was tiny except for her eyes, lustrous and black, and that was surgery, a silliness from a time when she had been in love with a Swedish merchant banker and thought it was only the epicanthic fold that kept him from loving her back. "Well? Shall we go in?"

Walthers had no idea what she was talking about, and must have shown it by his frown; Yee-xing butted his shoulder with her small, close-cropped head and looked up toward a storefront sign. In pale letters hanging in what looked like empty ebon space it said **Here After**.

Walthers examined it and then looked at the woman again. "It's an undertakers'," he guessed, and laughed as he thought he saw the point of her joke. "But we're not that bad off yet, Janie."

"It's not," she said, "or not exactly. Don't you recognize the name?" And then, of course, he did; it was one of the many Robinette Broadhead holdings on the list.

The more you learned about Broadhead, the more likely you could figure out what things would make him agree to a deal; that was sense. "Why not?" said Walthers, approving, and led her through the air-curtain into the cool, dark recesses of the shop. If it were not a funeral establishment, it had at least bought from the same decorators. There was soft, unidentifiable music in the background, and a fragrance of wildflowers, although the only floral display in sight was a single sheaf of bright roses in a crystal vase. A tall, handsome, elderly man rose before them; Walth-

ers could not say whether he had got up from one of the chairs or materialized as a hologram. The figure smiled warmly at them.

"Welcome to Here After. Is there someone near to you who is about to die?"

"Not that I know of," said Walthers.

"I see. Of course, we can still accomplish a great deal even if the person has already reached metabolic death, although the sooner we begin transfer the better — Or are you wisely making plans for your own future?"

"Neither one," said Yee-xing, "we just want to know what it is you offer."

"Of course," smiled the man, gesturing them to a comfortable couch. He did not appear to do anything to bring it about, but the lights became a touch brighter and the music dwindled a few decibels. "My card," he said, producing a pasteboard for Walthers and answering the question that had been bothering him: the card was tangible, and so were the fingers that handed it to him. "Let me run through the basics for you: it will save time in the long run. To begin with, Here After is not a religious organization and does not claim to provide salvation. What we do offer is a form of survival. Whether you — the 'you' that is here in this room at this moment — will be 'aware' of it or not," he smiled, "is a matter that the metaphysicians are still arguing. But the storage of your personalities, should you elect to provide for it, is guaranteed to pass Turing's Test, provided we are able to begin transfer while the brain is still in good condition, and the surroundings which the surviving client perceives will be those which he chooses from our available list. We have more than two hundred environments to offer, ranging —"

Yee-xing snapped her fingers. "The Dead Men," she said, suddenly comprehending.

The salesperson nodded, although his expression tightened a bit. "That is what the originals were called, yes. I see that you are familiar with the artifact called Heechee Heaven, now being used as a transport for colonists —"

"I'm the transport's Third Officer," Yee-xing said, quite truthfully except for tenses, "and my friend here is her Seventh."

"I envy you," the salesman said, and the expression on his face suggested that he really meant it. Envy did not keep him from delivering his sales pitch and Walthers listened attentively, Janie Yee-xing's hand holding his. He appreciated the hand; it kept him from thinking about the Dead Men and their protégé, Wan — or at least, about what Wan was likely to be doing at that moment.

The original Dead Men, the salesperson declared, were unfortunately rather botched; the transfer of their memories and personalities from the wet, gray storage receptacles in their skulls to the crystalline data-stores

that preserved them after death had been accomplished by unskilled labor, using equipment that had been designed for quite a different species in the first place. So the storage was imperfect. The easiest way to think of it, the salesman explained, was to think the Dead Men had been so stressed by their unskilled transfer that they had gone mad. But that happened no longer. Now the storage procedures had been so refined that any deceased could carry on a conversation with his survivors so deftly that it was just like talking to the real person. More! The "patient" had an active life in the data stores. He could experience the Moslem, Christian, or Scientological Heaven, complete with, respectively, beautiful boys scattered like pearls on the grass, choirs of angels, or the presence of L. Ron Hubbard himself. If his bent was not religious, he could experience adventure (mountain-climbing, skin-diving, skiing, hang-gliding, and free-fall T'ai chi were popular selections), listening to music of any kind, in any company he chose . . . and, of course (the salesman, failing to estimate reliably the relationship between Walthers and Yee-xing, delivered the information without color), sex. *All* varieties of the sexual experience. Over and over.

"How boring," said Walthers, thinking about it.

"For you and me," the salesman granted, "but not for them. You see, they don't remember the programmatic experiences very clearly. There's an accelerated decay bias applied to those data stores. Not to the others. If you talk to a dear one today, and come back a year from now and pick up the conversation, he'll remember it exactly. But the programmed experiences dwindle fast in their memories — just a recollection of pleasure, you see, so that they want to experience them again and again."

"How horrible," said Yee-xing. "Audee, I think it's time we went to the hotel."

"Not yet, Janie.

"Tell me," he asked the salesman, "when you talk about, ah, companionship in this, ah, state — can you have your choice of any companions you want? Even if they're still alive?"

"Anyone living or dead or imaginary. And, Mr. Walthers, they'll do anything you want them to!"

The Here Afters were, as a matter of fact, one of the little spinoff enterprises that I was fondest of, not because they earned much money. When we discovered that the Heechee had been able to store dead people's minds in machines, a light clicked. Well, says I to my good wife, if they can do it why can't we? Well, says my good wife to me, no reason at all, Robin, to be sure, just give me a little time to work out the encoding. I had not made any decision about whether I wanted it done to me, when and if. I was quite sure, though, that I didn't want it done to Essie, at least not right then, and so I was glad that the bullet had done no more than

puff her nose.

Well, somewhat more. It involved us with the Rotterdam police. We were taken to the office of Commissaris Lutzlek. A determined man. Short. Slim. Fair, with a sweet boy's face, though he had to be at least fifty to have become a Principal Commissaire. You could imagine him putting his thumb in the dyke and hanging in there forever, if he had to, or until he drowned. But you could not imagine him giving up. "Thank you for coming in about this business in the Stationsplein," he said, making sure we had seats.

"The accident," I said.

"No. Regretfully, not an accident. If it had been an accident, it would have been a matter for the municipal police rather than for me. So therefore this inquiry, for which we ask your co-operation."

I said, to put him in his place, "Our time is pretty valuable to be spent in this sort of thing."

He was not puttable. "Your life is even more valuable."

"Oh, come on! One of the soldiers in the parade was doing his twirling act, and he had a round in his gun and it went off."

"Mijnheer Broadhead," he said, "first, no soldier had a round in his gun; the guns are without firing pins in any case. Second, the soldiers are not even soldiers; they are college students hired to dress up for parades, just like the guards at Buckingham Palace. Third, the shot did not come from the parade."

"How do you know?"

"Because the gun has been found." He looked very angry. "In a police locker! This is quite embarrassing to me, Mijnheer, as you can imagine. There were many extra policemen for the parade, and they used a portable dressing-room van. The 'policeman' who fired the weapon was a stranger to others in the unit, but then they were drawn from many detachments. Come to clean up after the parade, he dressed quickly and left, with his locker open. There was nothing in it but the uniform — stolen, I suppose — and the gun, and a picture of you. Not of Mevrouw. Of you."

He sat back and waited. The sweet boy's face was peaceful.

I was not. It takes a minute to sink in, the announcement that somebody has the fixed intention of killing you. It was scary. Not just being killed: that's scary by definition. And I can testify, out of unforgotten and even repeated experience, to how scared I can get when it looks like death is near. But murder is worse than ordinary death. I said, "You know how that makes me feel? Guilty! I mean, I must have done something that really made somebody hate me."

"Exactly so, Mijnheer Broadhead. What do you suppose it could have been?"

"I have no idea. If you find the man, I suppose you can find the reason.

That shouldn't be too hard — there must be fingerprints or something? I saw news cameras, perhaps there's even a picture of him on somebody's film —"

He sighed. "Mijnheer, please do not tell me how to conduct police routine. All those things are of course being followed up, plus depth-interviews with everyone who might have seen the man, plus sweat analysis of the clothes, plus all other means of identification. I am assuming this man was a professional, and therefore those means will not succeed. So we approach it from the other direction. Who are your enemies, and what are you doing in Rotterdam?"

"I don't think I have any enemies. Business rivals, maybe, but they don't assassinate people."

He waited patiently, so I added, "As to what I'm doing in Rotterdam, I think that's quite well known. My business interests include some share in the exploitation of some Heechee artifacts."

"This is known," he said, not quite so patient.

I shrugged. "So I am a party in a suit at the International Palace of Justice."

The commissaris opened one of his desk drawers, peered inside, and slammed it again moodily. "Mijnheer Broadhead," he said, "you have had many meetings here in Rotterdam not connected with this suit, but instead with the question of terrorism. You wish it stopped."

"We all want that," I said, but the feeling in my belly was not just my degenerating pipes. I had thought I was being very secretive.

"We all want it, but you are doing something about it, Mijnheer. Therefore I believe you now do have enemies. The enemies of us all. The terrorists." He stood up and offered us the door. "So while you are in my jurisdiction I will see that you have police protection. After that, I can only urge caution, for I believe you are in danger from them."

"Everybody is," I said.

"Everybody is at random, yes. But you are now a particular case."

Our hotel had been built in the palmy days, for big-spending tourists and the jet-set rich. Just across from our suite door there was a marble Venus in the stairwell. Now it had a companion in a blue suit, a perfectly ordinary-looking man, studiously not meeting my eye. I looked at the cop escorting us. She grinned in embarrassment, nodded to her colleague in the stairwell, and closed the door behind us.

We were a particular case, all right.

I sat down and regarded Essie. Her nose was still somewhat swollen, but it did not seem to trouble her. Still, "Maybe you ought to go to bed," I suggested.

She looked at me with tolerant affection. "For a bloodied nose, Robin? How very foolish you are. Or do you have some more interesting project

in mind?"

It is a true tribute to my dear wife that, as soon as she brought the subject up, my damaged day and my damaged colon to the contrary notwithstanding, I did indeed have something in mind. After twenty-five years you would think that even sex would begin to get boring. My data-retrieval friend Albert had told me about studies of laboratory animals which proved that that was inevitable. Male rats were left with their mates and their frequency of intercourse measured. There was a steady decline over time. Boredom. Then they took away the old mates and introduced new ones. The rats perked up and went to it with a will. So this was established scientific fact — for rats — but I guess that I am not, at least in that sense, a rat. In fact I was enjoying myself quite a lot when, without warning, someone shoved a dagger right into my belly.

I couldn't help it. I yelled.

Essie pushed me away. She sat up swiftly, calling for Albert in Russian. Obediently his hologram sprang into life. He squinted toward me and nodded. "Yes," he said, "please, Mrs. Broadhead, place Robin's wrist against the dispenser on the bedside table."

I was bent double, hugging myself against the pain. For a moment I thought I was going to vomit, but what was in my gut was too bad to be expelled so easily. "Do something!" cried Essie, frantically pulling me to her bare breast as she pressed my arm against the table.

"I am already doing it, Mrs. Broadhead," said Albert, and as a matter of fact I could appreciate the sudden sense of numbness as the built-in injection needle force-sprayed something into my arm. The pain receded and became bearable. "You are not to be unduly alarmed, Robin," Albert said kindly, "nor you, Mrs. Broadhead. I have been anticipating this sudden ischemic pain for some hours. It is only a symptom."

"Damn arrogant program," cried Essie, who had written him, "symptom of what?"

"Of the beginning of the final rejection process, Mrs. Broadhead. It is not yet critical, especially as I am already administering medication along with the analgesia. Still, I propose surgery tomorrow."

I was feeling enough better already to sit up on the edge of the bed. I traced with my toe the design of arrows pointing toward Mecca that had been worked into the rug for long-gone big-spending oil magnates and said, "What about tissue match?"

"That has been arranged, Robin."

I let go of my stomach experimentally. It didn't explode. "I have a lot of appointments tomorrow," I pointed out.

Essie, who had been rocking me gently, let go and sighed. "Obstinate man! Why put off? Could have had transplant weeks ago and all this nonsense not necessary."

"I didn't want to," I explained, "and anyway, Albert said there was

time.”

“Was time! Oh, of course, was time. Is that reason to use time all up with fiddling and faddling until, oh, sorry, suddenly unexpected event takes place and time is all gone and you die? Like you warm and alive, Robin, not Here After program!”

I nuzzled her with my nose and chin. “Sick man! Get away from me!” she snarled, but did not draw away. “Huh! You feel better now.”

“Quite a lot better.”

“Good enough to talk sensibly and make appointment with hospital?”

I blew in her ear. “Essie,” I said, “I positively will, but not right this minute because, if I remember correctly, you and I have some unfinished business. Not Albert, though. So you will please turn yourself off, old friend.”

“Certainly, Robin,” he grinned, and disappeared. But Essie held me off, staring into my face for a long time before she shook her head.

“You Robin,” she said. “You want me to write you as Here After program?”

“Not a bit,” I said, “and actually, right now that’s not what I want to discuss.”

“Discuss!” she scoffed. “Ha, I know how you discuss. . . . All I wanted to say is, if I do write you, Robin, you bet in some ways I write you much different!”

It had been quite a day. It was not surprising that I didn’t remember certain unimportant details. My secretary program remembered, of course; and so I got a hint when the service door to the butler’s pantry opened and a procession of room-service waiters came in with dinner. Not for two. For four.

“Oh, my God,” said Essie, striking her forehead with the back of her hand. “Your poor friend with face like frog, Robin, you have invited for dinner! And look at you! Bare feet! Sitting in underwear! Nekulturny indeed, Robin, go and dress at once!”

I stood up, because there was no use arguing, but I argued anyway. “If I’m in my underwear, what about you?”

She gave me a scathing look. Actually she wasn’t in her underwear, she was wearing one of those Chinese things slit up the side. It looked as much like a dress as it did a nightgown, and she used it interchangeably for both.

“In case of Nobel laureate,” she said reprovingly, “what one wears is defining what is proper. Also have showered and you have not, so do so, for you smell of sexual activity — and, oh, my God,” she added, cocking an ear to sounds at the door, “I think are here already!”

I headed for the bathroom: actually, not a bathroom — all by itself it was a bath suite. The tub was big enough for two persons. Maybe for

three or four, but I hadn't been thinking in any numbers higher than two — though it did make me wonder just what those Arab tourists had liked doing in their baths. There was concealed lighting in the tub itself, statuary surrounding it that poured out hot water or cold, a deep pile rug throughout. All the vulgar little things like toilets were in decorous little cubicles of their own. It was fancy, but it was nice. "Albert," I called, pulling a blouse over my head, and he answered:

"Yes, Robin?"

There was no video in the bath, just his voice. I said, "I kind of like this. See if you can get me plans for putting one like this into the place at Tappan Sea."

"Certainly, Robin," he said, "but meanwhile, may I remind you that your guests are waiting?"

"You may, because you just did."

"And also, Robin, you are not to overexert yourself. The medication I gave you will be of purely temporary value, unless —"

"Turn yourself off," I ordered, and entered the main reception salon to greet my guests. A table had been set with crystal and china, candles were burning, wine was in a cooler and the waiters were standing politely at attention. Even the one with the bulge under his arm. "Sorry I kept you waiting, Audee," I said, beaming at them, "but it's been a hard day."

"Have told them," said Essie, passing a pâté to the young Oriental girl. "Was necessary, as stupid policeman at door considered them likely terrorists too."

"I tried to explain," grumbled Walthers, "but he didn't speak any English. Mrs. Broadhead had to sort him out. It's a good thing you speak Dutch."

She shrugged graciously. "Speak Deutsch, speak Dutch. Is same thing, provided one speaks loud. Also," she said informatively, "is only a state of mind. Tell me, Captain Walthers. You go to speak language, other person does not understand. What do you think?"

"Well, I think I haven't said it right."

"Ha! Exactly. But I, I think he has not *understood* it right. This is basic rule for speaking foreign language."

I rubbed my belly. "Let's eat," I said, and led the way to the table. But I had not failed to notice the look Essie gave me, so I exerted myself to be sociable. "Well, we're a sad-looking lot," I said genially, making note of the cast on Walthers's wrist, the bruise on Yee-xing's face, Essie's still puffy nose. "Been punching each other out, have you?"

As it turned out, that was not tactful, since Walthers promptly informed me that indeed they had, under the influence of the terrorists' TPT. So we talked about the terrorists for a while. And then we talked about the sad condition the human race had got itself into. It was not a cheerful conversation, especially as Essie decided to get philosophical.

"What a rotten thing human being is," she offered, and then reversed herself. "No. Am unjust. One human being can be quite fine, even as fine as we four sitting here. Not perfect. But on a statistical basis out of let us say one hundred chances to display kindness, altruism, decency — all these traits we humans esteem, you see — will in fact perform no fewer than twenty-five of them. But nations? Political groups? Terrorists?" She shook her head. "Out of one hundred chances, zero," she said. "Or perhaps one, but then, you may be sure, with some trick up sleeve. You see, wickedness is additive. Is perhaps one grain in each human being. But add up quantity of say ten million human beings in even small country or group, equals evil enough to damage entire world!"

"I'm ready for dessert," I said, gesturing to the waiters.

You would think that was a broad enough hint for any guest to take, especially considering that they already knew we'd had a bad day, but Walthers was obstinate. He lingered over dessert. He insisted on telling me his life's story, and he kept looking at the waiters, and all in all I was getting quite uncomfortable, not just in the belly.

Essie says I am not patient with people. Perhaps so. The friends I am most comfortable interacting with are computer programs rather than flesh and blood, and they don't have feelings to hurt — well, I'm not sure that's true for Albert. But it is for, say, my secretarial program or my chef. It is certain that I was getting impatient with Audee Walthers. His life had been a dull soap opera. He had lost his wife and his savings. He had made unauthorized use of equipment on the *S. Ya.* with Yee-xing's connivance, and got her fired. He had spent his last dime to get here to Rotterdam, reason not specified, but clearly it had something to do with me.

Well, I am not unwilling to "loan" money to a friend down on his luck but, see, I was in no mood. It was not just the fright over Essie or the screwed-up day, or the nagging worry about whether the next nut with a gun would actually get me. There was my damned gut giving me fits. At last I told the waiters to clear off, though Walthers was still lingering over his fourth cup of coffee. I stomped over to the table with the liqueurs and cigars and glowered at him as he followed. "What is it, Audee?" I said, no longer polite. "Money? How much do you need?"

And I got such a look from him! He hesitated, watching while the last of the waiters filed out through the pantry, and then he let me have it. "It isn't what I need," he said, his voice trembling, "it's what you're willing to pay for something you want. You're a real rich man, Broadhead. Maybe you don't worry about people who stick their asses in a crack for you, but I made the mistake of doing it twice."

I don't like being reminded I owe a favor, either, but I didn't get a chance to say anything. Janie Yee-xing put her hand on his bad wrist — gently. "Just tell him what you've got," she ordered.

"Tell me what?" I demanded, and the son of a gun shrugged and said, the way you might tell me you'd found my car keys on the floor:

"Why, tell you that I've found what I think is a real, live Heechee."

I
found
a
Heechee



... I've got a fragment of the True Cross ... I talked with God, literally I did — those statements are all in the same league. You don't believe them, but they scare you. And then, if you find they're true, or if you can't be sure they're not — then it's miracle time, and scared-to-death time. God and the Heechee. When I was a kid I didn't distinguish greatly between them, and even as a grown-up the confusion was still there.

It was past midnight when I was finally willing to let them go. By then I'd sucked them dry. I had the data-fan they'd swiped from the *S. Ya*. I had brought Albert in on the discussion to ask all the questions his fertile digital mind could invent. I was feeling pretty rotten and frayed, and the analgesia had long worn off, but I couldn't go to sleep. Essie announced firmly that if I was determined to kill self with over-exertion she was at least going to stay up to enjoy spectacle, and as soon as she was gently snoring on the couch I called Albert again. "One financial detail," I said. "Walthers said he'd passed up a million-dollar bonus to give this to me, so transfer, ah, two million to his account right away."

"Certainly, Robin." Albert Einstein never gets sleepy, but when he wants to indicate that it's past my bedtime he is perfectly capable of yawning and stretching. "I should remind you, though, that the state of your health —"

I told him what he could do with the state of my health. Then I told him what he could do with his idea of putting me in the hospital the next day. He spread his hands gracefully. "You're the boss, Robin," he said humbly. "Still, I've been thinking."

It is not true that Albert Einstein does not spend any time thinking. Since he moves at nuclear-particle speeds, however, the time involved is not usually perceptible to flesh-and-blood human beings like myself.

Unless he wants it to be, usually for dramatic effect. "Spit it out, Albert," I ordered, and he shrugged.

"It is only that, in your precarious health, I do not like to see you excited without reason."

"Reason! Jesus, Albert, sometimes you really act like a dumb machine. What more reason could anybody have than finding a living Heechee?"

"Yes," he said, puffing his pipe judiciously, and changed the subject. "From the sensor readings I am receiving, Robin, I would think you must be in considerable pain."

"How bright you are, Albert." The fact of the matter was that the churning in my gut had shifted gears. Now there was a mixer blade pureeing my belly, and every spin was a separate hurt.

"Should I wake Mrs. Broadhead and inform her?"

That message was in code. If we woke Essie to tell her something like that, it would at once result in her throwing me into bed, summoning the surgical programs and delivering me over to all the cossetting and curing Full Medical Plus could offer. The truth was it was beginning to look attractive. Pain scared me as dying did not. Dying was something you could get over and done with, at least, while pain looked unending.

But not right then! "No way, Albert," I said, "at least until you come out with whatever you're being so coy about. Are you telling me that I made a wrong assumption somewhere along the line? If so, tell me where."

"Only in terming Audee Walthers's perception a 'Heechee,' Robin," he said, scratching his chin with the stem of his pipe.

I sat up straight, and grabbed at my stomach because the sudden motion had not been a good idea. "What the hell else could it be, Albert?"

He said solemnly, "Let us review the evidence. Walthers said that the intelligence he perceived seemed to be slowed down, even stopped. This is consistent with the hypothesis it is Heechee, since they are thought to be presently in a black hole, where time is slowed."

"Right. Then why —"

"Second," he went on, "the detection was in interstellar space. This is also consistent, since the Heechee are known to have the capability."

"Albert!"

"Finally," he said calmly, disregarding the tone of my voice, "the detection was of an intelligent form of life, and other than ourselves" — he twinkled at me — "or, should I say, other than the human race — the Heechee are the only known such form. However," he said benignly, "the duplicate ship's log that Captain Walthers brought us raises serious questions."

"Get on with it, damn you!"

"Certainly, Robin. Let me display the data." He moved aside in his holographic frame, and a ship's chart leaped into existence. It showed a

distant pale blob, and along the right-hand margin symbols and numerals danced. "Note the velocity, Robin. Eighteen hundred kilometers a second. That is not an impossible velocity for a natural object — say, a condensation from the wave-front of a supernova. But for a Heechee vessel? Why would it be going so slowly? And does that in fact look like a Heechee vessel?"

"It looks like nothing at all, for God's sake! It's just a blur. At extreme range. You can't tell a thing."

The small figure of Albert to one side of the chart nodded. "Not as it is, no," he admitted, "but I believe I have been able to enhance the image. There is, of course, other negative evidence. If indeed the source is a black hole —"

"What?"

He affected to misunderstand me. "I was saying that the hypothesis that the source is in a black hole is not consistent with the total absence of gamma- or X-radiation from that region, as would presumably occur from infall of dust and gas."

"Albert," I said, "sometimes you go too far!"

He gazed at me with hooded-eyed concern. I know those calm stares of Albert's, and his pretenses of forgetting things, are only contrivances for effect. They do not reflect any appropriate reality — especially the times when he looks right into my eyes. The imaged eyes in Albert's holopics see no more than the eyes in a photograph. If he senses me, and he surely did sense me good, it was through camera lenses and hypersound pulses and capacitance probes and thermal imagers, none of which are located anywhere near the eyes of the image of Albert. But there are, all the same, moments when those eyes seem to be looking right into my soul. "You want to believe they are Heechee, don't you, Robin?" he asked softly.

"None of your business! Show me this image!"

"Very well."

The image mottled . . . marbled . . . cleared; and I was looking at an immense dragonfly. It more than filled the screen in Albert's little peep-show. Most of its gauzy wings could be made out only by the stars they obscured. But where all the wings came together there was a cylindrical object with points of light gleaming on its surface, and some of that light glittered off the wings themselves.

"It's a sailship," I gasped.

"Yes. A sailship," Albert agreed. "A photonic spacecraft. Its only propulsion is from light pressure against the array of sails."

"But, Albert — But, Albert, that must take forever."

He nodded. "In human terms, yes, that is a good description. At its estimated velocity the trip from, say, the Earth to the nearest star, Alpha Centauri, would take approximately six hundred years."

"My God. Six hundred years in that little thing?"

"It isn't little, Robin," he corrected me. "It is more distant than you perhaps realize. My ranging data is only approximate, but my best estimate is that the distance from sailtip to sailtip is not less than one hundred thousand kilometers."

On the damask couch Essie snorted, changed position, opened her eyes to look at me, said accusingly, "Still up, eh!", and closed her eyes again — all without waking up.

I sat back, and fatigue and pain swarmed over me. "I wish I were sleepy," I said. "I need to let all this simmer awhile before I can take it in."

"Of course, Robin. I'll tell you what I suggest," Albert said cunningly. "You didn't have much for dinner, so why don't I get room service to make you up some nice split-pea soup, or maybe some fish chowder —"

"You know what puts me to sleep, don't you?" I said, almost laughing, glad to have my thoughts brought back to the mundane. "Why not?"

So I moved back to the dining alcove. I let Albert's bartender sub-routine fix me a nice hot buttered rum, and Albert himself appeared in the PV-frame over the sideboard to keep me company. "Very nice," I said, finishing it. "Let's have another before I eat, all right?"

"Certainly, Robin," he said, fiddling with his pipestem. "Robin?"

"Yes?" I said, reaching for the new drink.

"Robin" — bashfully — "I've got an idea."

I was in a good mood to hear ideas, so I cocked an eyebrow at him as permission to go on. "Walthers gave me the notion: Institutionalize what you did for him. Set up annual awards. Like the Nobel prize, or the Gateway science bonuses. Six prizes a year, a hundred thousand dollars each, each one for someone in a particular field of science and discovery. I have prepared a budget —" He moved to one side, turning his head to glance toward a corner of the viewing frame. A neatly printed prospectus appeared there. "— showing that for a nominal outlay of six hundred thousand a year, nearly all of which would be recouped through tax savings and third-party participation —"

"Hold it, Albert. Don't be my accountant. Be my science advisor. Prizes for what?"

He said simply, "For helping to solve the riddles of the universe."

I sat back and stretched, feeling very relaxed and warm. And benign, even to a computer program. "Oh, hell, Albert, sure. Go ahead. Isn't the soup ready yet?"

"Right this minute," he said obligingly, and so it was. I dipped a spoon into it, and it was fish chowder. Thick. White, with lots of cream.

"I don't see the point, though," I said.

"Information, Robin," he said.

"But I thought you got all that sort of information anyway."

"Of course I do — after it's published. I have a conceptually keyed

search program going all the time, with more than forty-three thousand subject flags, and as soon as something on, say, Heechee language transcription appears anywhere, it automatically goes into my store. But I want it *before* it's published, and even if it *isn't* published. Like Auddee's discovery, do you see? Winners each year chosen by a jury — I would be glad," he twinkled, "to help you select the juries. And I have proposed six areas of inquiry." He nodded toward the display; the budget disappeared, replaced by a neat tabulation:

1. Heechee communications translation.
2. Observations and interpretation of the missing mass.
3. Analysis of Heechee technology.
4. Amelioration of terrorism.
5. Amelioration of international tensions.
6. Non-exploitive life extension.

"They all sound very commendable," I said approvingly. "The soup's fine, too."

"Yes," he said, "the chefs are very good at following instructions." I glanced up at him drowsily. His voice seemed gentler — no, perhaps the word is "sweeter" — than before. I yawned, trying to focus my eyes.

"Do you know, Albert," I said, "I never noticed it before, but you look a little like my mother."

He put down his pipe and regarded me sympathetically. "It's nothing to worry about," he said. "You've got nothing to worry about at all."

I regarded my faithful hologram with drowsy pleasure. "I guess that's right," I conceded. "Maybe it's not my mother you look like, though. Those big eyebrows —"

"It doesn't matter, Robin," he said gently.

"It doesn't, does it?" I agreed.

"So you might just as well go to sleep," he finished.

And that seemed like such a good idea that I did. Not right away. Not abruptly. Just slowly, gently; I lingered half-awake and I was absolutely comfortable and absolutely relaxed, so that I didn't quite know where half-awake ended and all-asleep began. I was in a dream or a reverie, that in-between state when you suspect you are sleeping, but don't care much, and the mind wanders. Oh, yes, my mind wandered. Very far. I was chasing around the universe with Wan, reaching into one black hole after another in search of something very important to him, and also very important to me, though I didn't know why. There was a face involved, not Albert's, not my mother's, not even Essie's, a woman's face with great dark eyebrows. . . .

Why, I thought, with pleased surprise, the son of a bitch has doped me! And meanwhile the great Galaxy turned and tiny particles of organic

matter pushed slightly less tiny particles of metal and crystal across the spaces between the stars; and the organic bits experienced pain and desolation and terror and joy in all their various ways; but I was all the way asleep and it did not matter to me a bit. Then.



One
small
bit

of organic matter named Dolly Walthers was busy experiencing all of those feelings — or all but joy — and a great deal of such other feelings as resentment and boredom. In particular boredom, except at those moments when the dominant feeling in her sorry small heart was terror. As much as anything, the inside of Wan's ship was like a chamber in some complicated, wholly automatic factory in which a small space had been left for human beings to crawl in to make repairs. Even the flickering golden coil which was part of the Heechee drive system was only partly visible; Wan had surrounded it with cupboarding to store food. Dolly's own personal possessions — they consisted mostly of her puppets and a six-month supply of tampons — were jammed into a cabinet in the tiny toilet. All the other space was Wan's. There was not much to do, and no room to do it in. Reading was one possible way to pass the time. The only data fans Wan owned that were readable, really, were mostly children's stories, recorded for him, he said, when he was tiny. They were extremely boring to Dolly, though not quite as boring as doing nothing at all. Even cooking and cleaning were not as boring as nothing at all, but the opportunities were limited. Some cooking smells drove Wan to take refuge in the lander — or more often to stamp and rage at her. Laundry was easy, involving only putting their garments in a sort of pressure-cooker that forced hot steam through them, but then as they dried they raised the humidity of the air and that, too, was cause for stamping and raging. He never really hit her — well, not counting what he probably thought of as amorous play — but he scared her a lot.

He did not scare her as much as the black holes they visited, one after another. They scared Wan, too. Fear did not keep him from going on, it only made him even more impossible to live with.

When Dolly realized that this whole mad expedition was only a hopeless search for Wan's long-lost, and surely long-dead, father, she felt real tenderness for him. She wished he would let her express it. There were times when, especially after sex, especially on those rare occasions when he did not at once either go to sleep or drive her away from him with some cutting and unforgivably critical intimate remark — those times when, for a few minutes at least, they would hold each other in silence. Then she would feel a great yearning to make human contact with him. There were times when she wanted to put her lips to his ear and whisper, "Wan? I know how you feel about your father. I wish I could help."

But, of course, she never dared.

The other thing she never dared do was to tell him that, in her opinion, he was going to kill them both — until they came to the eighth hole and she had no choice. Even two days away from it — two days in faster-than-light travel, nearly a light-year in distance — it was different. "Why is it funny-looking?" she demanded, and Wan, not even looking around as he hunched before the screen, only said what she expected:

"Shut up." Then he went on gabbling with his Dead Men. Once he realized she could speak neither Spanish nor Chinese he talked with them openly before her, but not in a language intelligible to her.

"No, please, honey," she said, a sick feeling in her stomach. "It's all wrong!" Why wrong she could not have said. The object on the screen was tiny. It was not very clear, and it jiggled about the screen. But there was no sign of the quick coruscations of energy as stray wisps of matter destroyed themselves as infall. Yet there was something to see, a swimmy sort of blue radiance that was certainly not black.

"Pah," he said, sweating, and then, because he was scared as well, he ordered, "Tell the bitch what she wants. In English."

"Mrs. Walthers?" The voice was hesitant and faint; it was a dead person's voice, all right, if a person's at all. "I was explaining to Wan that this is what is called a 'naked singularity.' That means it is not rotating, therefore it is not exactly black. Wan? Have you compared it with the Heechee charts?"

He grumbled, "Of course, foolish, I was just about to do so!" but his voice was shaking as he touched the controls. Next to the image itself another image formed. There was the bluish, cloudy, eye-straining object. And there, on the other half of the screen, the same object, with around it a cluster of bright, short red lines and flickering green circles.

The Dead Man said with dismal satisfaction, "It is a danger object, Wan. The Heechee have tagged it so."

"Idiot fool! All black holes are dangerous!" He snapped off the speaker and turned to Dolly with anger and contempt. "You're frightened too!" he accused, and stomped off to the stolen and frightening gadgets in the lander.

It was not consoling to Dolly to see that Wan was also shaking. She waited, staring hopelessly at the screen, for the mind-touch that would be Wan's exploratory reaching with the TPT. It was a long wait, because the TPT did not work at interstellar distances, and she slept in fits, and woke to peer into the lander hatch to see Wan, unmoving, crouched by the glittering mesh and the diamond-bright corkscrew, and slept again.

She was asleep when her dreams were interrupted by the hating, fearing, obsessed stab of Wan's troubled mind through the TPT, and no more than half awake when he flung himself back into the main cabin and stood over her. "A person!" he gabbled, his eyes blinking wildly as sweat streamed into them from his forehead. "Now I must reach inside!"

And meanwhile I was dreaming of a deep, steep gravitational hole and a treasure concealed in it. While Wan was deploying his stolen gadgets, sweating with terror, I was sweating with pain. While Dolly was staring wonderingly at the great ghostly blue object on her screen, I was staring at the same object. She had never seen it before. I had. I had a picture of it over my bed, and I had taken that picture at a time when I hurt even more and was even more disoriented. I tried to sit up, and Essie's strong, gentle hand pushed me back. "Are still on life-support systems, Robin," she scolded. "Must not move around too much!"

I was in the little hospice chamber we had built onto the house at Tappan Sea, when it began to seem too much trouble to go to some clinic every time one of us needed repairs. "How did I get here?" I managed.

"By airplane, how else?" She leaned past me to study something on the screen over my head and nodded.

"I've had the operation," I deduced. "That son of a bitch Albert knocked me out. You flew me home while I was still under."

"How clever! Yes. Is all over. Doctor says you are healthy peasant pig and will recover quickly," she went on, "only with bellyache continuing a while because of two point three meters new intestine. Eat now. Then sleep some more."

I leaned back while Essie fussed with the chef program and stared at the holopic. It was put there to remind me, no matter how unpleasant the tinkering that was going on to keep me alive, that there had been times far more unpleasant still, but that wasn't what it was reminding me of. What it was reminding me of was a woman I had lost. I will not say I had not thought of her for years because that would be untrue. I thought of her often — but as a remote memory, and now I was thinking of her as a person. "Time now," Essie caroled merrily, "for nourishing fish broth!" By God, she wasn't fooling; that was what it was, nauseous-smelling but, she said, laced with all the things I needed and could tolerate in my present condition. And meanwhile Wan was fishing in the black hole with the clever and complicated machinery of the Heechee; and meanwhile it

had just occurred to me that the sickening stuff I was eating was laden with more than medicine; and meanwhile the clever machinery was performing a separate task Wan did not know about; and meanwhile I forced myself awake enough to ask Essie how long I had been asleep, and how much longer I could expect to be and she was saying, "Quite some time, both ways, dear Robin," and then I was asleep again.

The separate task was notification, for of all the Heechee artifacts the disruptor of order in aligned systems was the one the Heechee worried about most. Improperly used, they feared, it could disrupt their own order decisively and nastily, and so each one had a built-in alarm.

When you fear that somebody may sneak up on you in the dark you set snares — a dragline of clashing tin pans on a tripcord, or a booby-trap to crash down on an intruder's head — whatever. And there is no greater dark than the dark between the stars, so the Heechee set up their early-warning sentinels there. The snares the Heechee had set were numerous, supple and very, very loud. When Wan deployed his corkscrew it was signaled at once, and at once was when Captain's communications officer reported it to him. "The alien has done it," he said, muscles writhing, and Captain uttered a biological expletive. In translation it would not sound like much to a human being, because it referred to the act of sexual coupling at a time when the female was not in love. Captain didn't say it for its technical meaning. He said it because it was violently obscene, and because nothing less would relieve his feelings. When he saw that Twice started nervously as she leaned to her remote-control board, he was instantly contrite.

Captain had the worries most because he was Captain, but it was Twice who had most of the work. She was operating three remotes at once: the command ship they were about to transfer to, the cargo hauler for hiding the sailship away, and a special drone in the Earth planetary system commanded to survey all transmissions and locate all spaceborne artifacts. And she was in no condition for any of this. The time of loving had come on her, steroids flowed briskly through her wiry veins, the biological program was running and her body had ripened for its job. Not just her body. Twice's personality ripened, too, and softened. The strain of trying to guide her drones with a body and nervous system that was tuned for a season of preoccupying sexual coupling was torture. Captain leaned toward her. "Are you all right?" he asked. She didn't answer. That was answer enough.

He sighed and turned to the next problem. "Well, Shoe?"

The communications officer looked almost as distraught as Twice. "A few conceptual correspondences have been established, Captain," he reported. "But the translation program is very far from complete."

Captain twitched his cheek muscles. Was there any unexpected, illogi-

cal thing that could go wrong that had not gone wrong already? These communications — not only was it dangerous that they could exist in the first place, but they were in several languages! Several! Not just two, as was right and proper in the Heechee scheme of things. Not just The Language of Do and The Language of Feel, as the Heechee themselves spoke, but in literally scores of mutually incomprehensible tongues. It might have eased the pain of hearing this endless blab of chatter if, at least, he had been able to find out what they were saying.

So many worries and problems! Not just the visible sight of Twice getting weaker and more erratic every hour, not just the terrible shock of knowing that some non-Heechee creature was activating the mechanisms that could pierce a black hole; the biggest worry for Captain was whether or not he was capable of dealing with all these consequential challenges. Meanwhile there was a job to be done. They located the sailship and homed in on it, no problem. They dispatched a message to its crew but, wisely, did not wait for an answer. The command ship, wakened out of its millennia-long powered-down sleep, turned up on schedule. They transferred themselves, lock to lock, to the bigger, more powerful vessel. That, too, was almost no problem, though Twice, gasping and whimpering as she raced from board to board, was slow in taking over her remote command functions in the new ship. No harm done, though. And the lumbering cargo bubble also appeared where it was supposed to, and even when.

The Heechee left only small scout ships for human beings to discover; they were careful not to leave their special-purpose spacecraft where they were easily located. For example, the bubble transport. This was nothing more than a hollow metal sphere fitted with faster-than-light drive and navigation equipment. The Heechee apparently used it to move bulk materials from place to place; the human race could have used it very well indeed. Each bubble transport could hold the equivalent of a thousand **S. Ya**-class transports. Ten of them could have solved Earth's population problem in a decade.

The whole process took nearly twelve hours. For Twice, they were hours of unrelenting toil. Captain had less to do, which left him plenty of time to keep an eye on her. He watched her coppery skin turn purple with unfulfilled amorousness even while it was darkening with fatigue. It worried him. They had been so unready for all these challenges! If they had known there was going to be an emergency, he could easily have shipped an extra drone-operator to share Twice's burden. If they had

dreamed it would be necessary, they could have taken a command vessel in the first place, and spared the strain of changing ships. If they had thought — If they had suspected — If they had had any intimation at all —

But they hadn't. Really, how could they? Even by galactic time it had been only a few decades since the last peek outside the hiding place at the core — only a wink in astronomical time, and how could anyone have believed that so much could happen in it?

Captain rummaged through food-packets until he found the tastiest and easiest to digest, and fed them affectionately to Twice at her board. She had little appetite. Her movements were slower, less sure, more difficult for her every hour. But she was getting the job done. When at last the photon ship's sails had been furled, the great maw of the bubble vessel was open, the mothlike capsule that carried the sailship passengers slipping slowly into the bubble, Captain began to breathe freely again. For Twice, at least, that was the hardest part of what they would have to do. Now she would have a chance to rest — maybe even a chance to do, with him, what her body and soul were overready to do.

Because the sailship people had responded to his message instantly — for them it was instantly — their reply came before the great gleaming sphere had closed on them. The communications officer, Shoe, keyed his screen and the message appeared:

We accept that we must not complete our voyage.

We request that you convey us to a place where we will be safe.

We query: Are the other ones returning?

Captain shrugged with sympathy. To Shoe he said, "Transmit to them: 'We are returning you to your home system for the time being. If possible, we will bring you back here later.' "

Shoe's expression was strained, with a mixture of emotions. "What about their query about the other ones?"

Captain felt a quick shudder in his abdomen. "Tell them not yet," he said.

But it was not the fear of the other ones that was uppermost in Captain's mind, not even his concern for Twice. The Heechee shared with the human race an astonishing number of traits: curiosity, male-female love, family solidarity, devotion to children, a pleasure in the manipulation of symbols. The magnitude of the shared traits was not always the same, however. There was one psychological characteristic that the Heechee possessed in a far stronger degree than most humans:

Conscience.

The Heechee were almost physically incapable of repudiating an obligation or letting a wrong go unrighted. For the Heechee, the sailship people were a special case. The Heechee *owed* them. It was from them that they had learned the most frightening fact the Heechee had ever had to face.

The Heechee and the sailship people had known each other well, but not recently, and not for very long. The relationship had begun badly for the sailship people. For the Heechee, it had ended even worse. It was not possible for either of them ever to forget the other.

In the slow, gurgling eddies the sailship people sang it was told how the cone-shaped landing vessels of the Heechee had suddenly appeared, terribly hard and terribly swift, in the sweet slush of their home. The Heechee ships had flashed about the floating arcologies of the people with much cavitation and significant local temperature rises. Many had died. Much damage had been done before the Heechee understood that these were sentient and even civilized beings, if slow ones.

The Heechee were terribly shocked at what they had done. They tried to make amends. The first step was communication, and that was difficult. The task took a very long time — long, at least, for the Heechee, though the time for the sludge dwellers was bewilderingly short before a hard, hot octahedral prism slid itself cautiously into the middle of an arcology. Almost at once it began to speak to them in a recognizable, though laughably ungrammatical, form of their own language.

After that events moved with blinding speed — for the slush-dwellers. For the Heechee, watching them in their daily lives was a lot like watching lichens grow. Captain himself had visited their great gas-giant planet — not a captain then, almost what could have been called a cabin boy: young, yeasty, adventurous, with that considerable — if cautious — Heechee optimism for the boundless future that had collapsed on them so terrifyingly. The gas giant was not the only marvelously exciting place the young Heechee visited. He visited Earth and met the australopithecines, he helped chart gas clouds and quasars, he ferried crews to outposts and construction projects. Years passed. Decades passed. The slow work of translating the sludge dwellers' communications inched forward. It could have gone a little faster if the Heechee had thought it particularly important; but they did not. It couldn't have gone very much faster in any case, because the sludge dwellers couldn't.

But it was interesting, in an antiquarian, touristy sort of way, because the sludge dwellers had been around for a long, long time. Their chill biochemistry was something like three hundred times slower than a Heechee's, or a human's. Heechee recorded history went back five or six millennia — more or less the same as humanity's, at the same stage in technological evolution. The recorded history of the sludge dwellers went

back three hundred times as far. There were nearly two million years of consecutive, dated historical data. The earliest folk tales and legends and eddas were ten times earlier still. They were no harder to translate than the later ones, because the slush dwellers did not move very fast even in the evolution of their language; but the massed minds who translated them judged them not very interesting. They put the work of translating them off . . . until they discovered that two of them spoke of visitations from space.

Robin doesn't tell much about the sailship people, mostly because he didn't then know much. But that's a pity. They're interesting. Their language was made up of words of one syllable — one consonant, one vowel. They had some fifty distinguishable consonants, and fourteen vowels and diphthongs to play with — therefore they had for three-syllable units, such as names, 3.43×10^6 combinations. That was plenty, especially for names, because that was orders of magnitude more males than they had ever had to give names to, and they didn't name the females.

When a male impregnated a female, he produced a male child. He only did it rarely, because it cost him a great investment of energy. Unfertilized females produced females, more or less routinely. Bearing males, however, cost them their lives. They didn't know that — or anything else, really. There are no love stories in the eddas of the sailship people.

When I think of all those years the human race labored under the galling knowledge of inferiority — because the Heechee had done so much more than we had, and done it so much earlier — I have many regrets. I think I regret most that we didn't know about the Two Eddas. I don't mean just knowing the eddas themselves, for they would only have given us one more thing to worry about though a reassuringly remote one. I mean mostly what they did to the Heechee morale.

The first song was from the very dawn of the slush dwellers' civilization, and quite ambiguous. It was a visitation of the gods. They came, shining so brightly that even the slushers' rudimentary optics could perceive them — shining with such a turbulence of energy that they caused the soupy gases to seethe and boil, and many died. They did no more than that, and when they went away they never returned. The song itself didn't mean much. It had no details that the Heechee found believable, and most of it was about a certain ur-slusher hero who dared defy the visitors, and came to rule a whole soggy sector of their planet as a reward.

But the second song was more specific. It dated millions of years later — almost within the historical period. It sang once more of visitors from outside the dense home world, but this time they were not mere tourists. They weren't conquerors, either. They were refugees. They plunged down to the soggy surface, one shipload of them, it seemed, poorly equipped to survive in an environment that was cold, dense poison for them.

They hid there. They stayed for a long time, by their standards — more than a hundred years. Long enough for the slush-dwellers to discover them, and even to establish a kind of communication. They had been attacked by creatures that flamed like fire, wielding weapons that crushed and burned. Their home planet had been flamed clean. Every vessel they owned in space had been pursued and destroyed.

And then, when generations of the refugees had managed to survive and even multiply, it all came to an end. The flaming fire-creatures found them, and boiled a whole huge shallow of the sludgy methane sea dry to destroy them.

When the Heechee heard this song they might have taken it for fable, except for one term. The term was not easy to translate, for it had had to survive both the incomplete communications with the refugees and the lapse of two million years. But it had survived.

It was what caused the Heechee to stop everything they did, so that they could concentrate on a single task: the verification of the old edda. They sought out the home of the fugitives and found it — a planet scorched bare by a sun that had exploded. They sought for, and found, artifacts of previous space-going civilizations. Not many. None in good condition. But nearly forty separate bits and pieces of half-melted machines, and they isotope-dated them to two separate epochs. One of them coincided in time with the fugitives who fled to the slush planet. The other was many millions of years older.

They concluded that the stories were true: there had been such a race of assassins; they had wiped out every space-faring civilization they had discovered, for more than twenty million years.

And the Heechee came to believe that they were still somewhere around. For the term that had been so hard to translate described the expansion of the heavens, and the reversal by the flame-wielders so that all the stars and galaxies would crush together again. For a purpose. And it was impossible to believe that these titans, whoever they were, would not linger to see the results of the process they had begun.

And the bright Heechee dream crumbled, and the slush-dwellers sang a new edda: the song of the Heechee who visited, learned to be afraid and ran away.

So the Heechee set their booby-traps, hid most of the other evidence of

their existence, and retreated to their hidey-hole at the core of the Galaxy.

Robin does not explain very well what the Heechee were afraid of. They had deduced that the purpose of causing the universe to contract again was to return it to the primordial atom — after which it would burst in another Big Bang and start a new universe. They further deduced that, in that case, the physical laws that govern the universe might develop in a different way.

What scared them most was the thought of beings who thought they would be happier in a universe with different physical laws.

In one sense, the sludge dwellers were just one of the booby-traps. LaDzhaRi knew that; they all did; that was why he had followed the ancestral commandment and reported that first touch of another mind on his. He expected an answer, though it had been years, even in LaDzhaRi's time, since there had been a Heechee manifestation of any kind, and then only the quick touch of a routine TPT survey. He had also expected that when the answer came he would not like it. The whole epic struggle of building and launching the interstellar ship, the centuries already invested in their millennium-long journey — wasted! It was true that a flight of a thousand years to LaDzhaRi was no more than an ordinary whaling voyage for a Nantucket captain; but a whaler would not have liked being picked up in mid-Pacific and taken home empty, either. The whole crew had been upset. The excitement in the sailship had been so great that some of the crew involuntarily went into fast mode; the sludgy liquid was so churned that cavitation bubbles formed. One of the females was dead. One of the males, TsuTsuNga, was so demoralized that he was pawing over the surviving females, and not for dinner, either. "Please don't be foolish," LaDzhaRi pleaded. For a male to impregnate a female, as TsuTsuNga seemed about to do, involved so large an investment of energy that sometimes it threatened his life. For the females there was no threat — their lives were simply forfeited in order to bear a fertilized child — but they didn't know that, of course, or much of anything else, really. But TsuTsuNga said steadily:

"If I cannot become immortal by voyaging to another star, then at least I will father a son."

"No! Please! Think, my friend," begged LaDzhaRi, "we can be home if we wish. Can return as heroes to our arcologies, can sing our eddas so the entire world will hear —" for the sludge of their homes carried sound as well as a sea, and their songs reached as far as a great whale's.

TsuTsuNga touched LaDzhaRi briefly, almost contemptuously, at

least dismissingly. "We're not heroes!" he said. "Go away and let me do this female."

And LaDzhaRi reluctantly released him, and listened to the dwindling sounds as he moved away. It was true. They were failed heroes at best.

The sailship people were not without such human traits as pride. It did not please them to be the Heechees' — what? Slaves? Not exactly, for the only service they were required to perform was to report, via sealed-beam communicator, any evidence of other spacefaring intelligence. They were very glad to do that for their own sakes, more than for the Heechees'. If not slaves, then what?

There was only one word that was right: Pets.

So the racial psyche of the slush-dwellers contained a patch of tarnish they could never burnish away, with whatever feats of interstellar venturing they might accomplish in their vast, slow starjammers. They knew they were pets. It was not the first time for them. Long before the Heechee came they had been chattels, in almost the same way, to beings quite unlike the Heechee, or humans, or themselves; and when, generations before, their sooth-singers had roared the ancient eddas about those others into the Heechee listening machine, the slush-dwellers had not failed to notice that the Heechee ran away. A pet was not the worst thing one could be.

So love and fear were abroad in the universe. For love (what passed among the slush-dwellers for love), TsuTsuNga damaged his health and risked his life. Dreaming of love, I lay in my hospice, waking less than an hour every day, while my store-bought innards reconciled themselves to the rest of me. Terrified by love, Captain saw Twice grow thinner and darker.

For Twice had not gotten better once the cargo bubble was en route. The surcease had come too late. The closest thing they had to a medical specialist was Burst, the black-hole operator, but even at home, even with the finest care, few females could survive unrequited love combined with terrible strain.

It was no surprise to Captain when Burst appeared, hangdog, pitying, and said, "I'm sorry. She is joining the massed minds."

It is not a cheap commodity, love. Some of us can have it and never face the bill, but only if someone else picks up the check.

* * *

Everyone
conspired
against
me



— even the wife of my bosom — even my trusted data-retrieval program. In the brief moments they allowed me to be awake they gave me a free choice. “You can go to the clinic for a complete checkup,” said Albert, sucking judiciously at his pipe.

“Or can stay the damn Hell asleep until are damn sure you are all better,” said Essie.

“Ah-ha,” I said, “I thought so! You’ve been keeping me unconscious, haven’t you? It’s probably been days since you knocked me out and let them cut me open.” Essie avoided my eyes. I said nobly, “I don’t blame you for that; but, don’t you see, I want to go look at this thing Walthers found! Can’t you understand that?”

She was still not meeting my eyes. She glowered at the hologram of Albert Einstein. “Seems damn peppy today. You keeping this khuligan tranked up good?”

Albert’s image coughed. “Actually, Mrs. Broadhead, the medical program advised against any unnecessary sedation at this point.”

“Oh, God! Will be awake, bothering us day and night! That settles it, you Robin, you go to clinic tomorrow.” And all the time she was snarling at me, her hand was on the back of my neck, caressing; words can be liars, but you can feel the touch of love.

So I said: “I’ll meet you halfway. I’ll go to the clinic for the complete physical on condition that if I pass you don’t give me any more arguments about going into space.”

Essie was silent, calculating, but Albert cocked an eyebrow at me. “I think that might be a mistake, Robin.”

“That’s what us human beings are for, to make mistakes. Now, what’s for dinner?”

You see, I had calculated that if I showed a happy appetite they would take it as a good sign, and maybe they did. I had also calculated that my new ship wouldn’t be ready for several weeks, anyway, so there was no

real hurry — I wasn't about to take off in another cramped, smelly Five when I had a yacht of my own coming along. What I had not calculated on was that I had forgotten how much I hated hospitals.

The diagnostic procedures at the clinic didn't bother to be polite. They weren't really painful. They numbed the surface of my skin before going much farther, and once you get inside the surface there aren't that many nerve-endings to worry about. All I really felt were tweaks and pokes and tickles. But a *lot* of them, and besides I knew what they were doing. Hair-thin light pipes were peering around the inside of my belly. Needle-sharp pipettes were sucking out plugs of tissue for analysis. Siphons were sipping up my bodily fluids; sutures were checked, scars were appraised. The whole thing took less than an hour; but it seemed longer and, honestly, I'd rather have been doing something else.

Then they let me put my clothes back on and I was allowed to sit down in a comfortable chair in the presence of a real, live, human doctor. They even let Essie sit in, but I didn't give her a chance to talk. I got in first. "What do you say, doc?" I asked. "How long after the operation can I go into space? I don't mean rockets, I mean a Lofstrom loop, about as traumatic as an elevator. You see, the loop just sort of pulls you along on a magnetized ribbon —"

The doctor held up his hand. He was a plump, white-haired Santa Claus of a man, with a neat, close-trimmed white beard and bright blue eyes. "I know what a Lofstrom loop is."

"Good, I'm glad of that. Well?"

"Well," he said, "the usual practice after surgery such as yours is to avoid anything like that for three to four weeks, but —"

"Oh, no! Doc, no!" I said. "Please! I don't want to have to hang around for practically a month!"

"The fact is that you were operated on forty-three days ago this morning. You can do just about anything you want to now. Including taking a ride on a loop."

Time was when the road to the stars led through Guiana or Baikonur or the Cape. You had to burn about a million dollars' worth of liquid hydrogen to get into orbit, before you could transship to something going farther away. Now we had the Lofstrom launch loops spaced around the Equator, immense gossamer structures that you couldn't see until you were almost beside them — well, within twenty kilometers, which was where the satellite landing field was. I watched it with pleasure and pride as we circled and descended to touchdown. I craned my neck to keep the loop in view as we entered final approach. Faintly, along the top of the ski-jump launch section, I could see capsules speeding up through three gravities acceleration and neatly, gently detaching themselves at the steepest part of the upslope to disappear into the blue. Beautiful! No

chemicals, no combustion, no damage to the ozone layer. Not even the energy-wastage of a Heechee lander launch; some things we could do even better than the Heechee did!

Time was when even being in orbit was not enough, and then you had to take the long, slow Hohmann journey to the Gateway asteroid. Usually you were scared out of your bird, because everybody knew that more Gateway prospectors got killed than got rich; and because you were space-sick and cramped and condemned to inhabit that interplanetary slammer for weeks or months on end before you even got to the asteroid; and most of all because you'd risked everything you owned or could borrow to pay for it. Now we had a Heechee Three chartered and waiting for us in low Earth orbit. We could transship in our shirtsleeves and be on our way to the far stars before we'd finished digesting our last meal on Earth — that is, *we* could, because we had the muscle and the money to pay for it.

Time was when going out into that interstellar nothingness was a lot like playing Russian roulette. The only difference was that if the luck of the draw was favorable, whatever you found at the end of the journey might make you rich beyond richness forever — as it ultimately did me. But what you mostly got made was dead.

"Is much better now," Essie sighed as we climbed down out of the aircraft and blinked around in the hot South American sun.

"I wish Audree Walthers were going with us," I said, looking out at the launch loop. We were still kilometers away, on the far shore of Lake Tehigualpa. I could see the loop reflected in it, blue at the center of the lake, greeny-yellow near the shore, where they had sown edible algae, and it was a pretty sight.

"If you wanted him with you, should not have given him two mil to chase his wife with," said Essie practically, and then, looking at me more closely, "How you feeling?"

"Absolutely in the pink," I said. It wasn't far from true. "Quit worrying about me. When you've got Full Medical Plus they don't dare let you die before you reach a hundred, it's bad for business."

"Don't have much to say about it," she said gloomily, "when customer is reckless desperado who spends time chasing for make-believe Heechee! Anyway," she added, brightening, "here is van for fleabag, hop in."

So when we were inside the van I leaned over and kissed the back of her neck — easy to do, because she had braided her long hair and brought it around her neck to tie in front like a kind of a necklace — getting ready for the launch, you see. She leaned against my lips. "Khuligan," she sighed. "But not *bad* khuligan."

The hotel wasn't really a fleabag. They had given us a comfortable suite on the top floor, looking over the lake and the loop. Besides, we would only be in it for a few hours. I left Essie to key in her programs on the hotel

PV-screen while I wandered over to the window, telling myself, indulgently, that I wasn't really a hooligan. But that wasn't true, because it certainly was not the act of a responsible senior citizen of wealth and substance to skylark off into interstellar space just for the glamor and excitement of it.

It occurred to me then that Essie might not be taking quite that view of my motives. She might think I was after something else.

And then I felt a sort of quivery not-quite-pain in my middle. It had nothing to do with my two point three meters of new gut. What it had to do with was the hope, or the fear, that somehow Gelle-Klara Moynlin might indeed turn up in my life again. There was more emotion left over there than I had realized. It made my eyes tear, so that the spidery launch structure out the window seemed to ripple in my sight.

But there were no tears in my eyes.

And it wasn't an optical illusion. "My God!" I shouted. "Essie!" And she hurried over to stand beside me and look at the tiny flare of light from a capsule on the launch run, and the shaking, shuddering of the whole thread-thin structure. Then there was the noise — a single faint blast like a distant cannon shot, and then the lower, slower, longer thunder of the immense loop tearing itself apart. "My God," Essie echoed faintly, clutching my arm. "Terrorist?"

And then she answered herself. "Of course terrorist," she said bitterly. "Who else could be so vile?"

I had opened our windows to get a good look at the lake and the loop; good thing, because that meant they weren't blown in. Others in the hotel were not so lucky. The airport itself wasn't touched, not counting the occasional aircraft sent flying because it wasn't tied down. But the airport officials were scared. They didn't know whether the destruction of the launch loop was an isolated incident of terrorist sabotage, or maybe the beginnings of a revolution — no one seemed to think, ever, that it might have been just a simple accident. It was scary, all right. There's a Hell of a lot of kinetic energy stored in a Lofstrom loop, over twenty kilometers of iron ribbon, weighing about five thousand tons, moving at twelve kilometers a second. Out of curiosity I asked Albert later and he reported that it took 3.6×10^{14} joules to pump it up. And when one collapses, all those joules come out at once, one way or another.

I asked Albert later, because I couldn't ask him then. Naturally, the first thing I did was to try to key him up, or any other data-retrieval or information program that could tell me what was going on. The comm circuits were jammed; we were cut off. The broadcast PV was still working, though, so we stood and watched that mushroom cloud grow and listened to damage reports. One shuttle was actually accelerating on the ribbon when it blew — that was the first explosion, perhaps because it

had carried a bomb. Three others had been in the loading bypass. More than two hundred human beings were now hamburger, not counting the ones they hadn't counted yet who had been working on the launcher itself, or had been in the duty-free shops and bars underneath it, or maybe just out for a stroll nearby. "I wish I could get Albert," I grumbled to Essie.

"As to that, dear Robin," she began, hesitantly, but didn't finish because there was a knock on the door; would the señor and the señora come at once to the Bolivar Room, *por favor*, as there was a matter of the gravest emergency.

The matter of the gravest emergency was a police checkup, and you never saw such a checking of passports. The Bolivar Room was one of those function things that they divide up for meetings and open for grand banquets, and one partitioned-off part of it was filled with turistas like ourselves, many of them squatting on their baggage, all looking both resentful and scared. They were being kept waiting. We were not. The bellhop who fetched us, wearing an armband with the initials **S.E.R.** over his uniform, escorted us to the dais where a lieutenant of police studied our passports briefly and then handed them back. "Señor Broadhead," he said in English, accent excellent, touches of American midwest, "does it occur to you that this act of terrorist violence may in fact have been aimed personally at you?"

I gawked. "Not until now," I managed. He nodded.

"Nevertheless," he went on, touching a PV hard-copy printout with his small, graceful hand, "we have received from Interpol a report of a terrorist attempt on your life only two months ago. Quite a well organized one. The commissaris in Rotterdam specifically suggests that it did not appear random, and that further attempts might well be made."

I didn't know what to say to that. Essie leaned forward. "Tell me, teniente," she said, regarding him, "is this your theory?"

"Ah, my *theory*. I wish I had a theory," he said furiously. "Terrorists? No doubt. Aimed against you? Possibly. Aimed against the stability of our government? Even more possibly, I think, as there has been widespread dissatisfaction in rural areas; there are even reports, I tell you in confidence, that certain military units may be planning a coup. How can one know? So I ask you the necessary questions, such as, have you seen anyone whose presence here struck you as suspicious or coincidental? No? Have you any opinion as to who attempted to assassinate you in Rotterdam? Can you shed any light at all on this terrible deed?"

The questions came so fast that it hardly seemed he expected answers, or even wanted them. That bothered me nearly as much as the destruction of the loop itself; it was a reflection, here, of what I had been seeing and sensing all over the world. A sort of despairing resignation, as though things were bound to get worse and no way could be found to get them

better. It made me very uncomfortable. "We'd like to leave and get out of your way," I said, "so if you're through with your questions —"

He paused before he answered, and began to look like someone with a job he knew how to do again. "I had intended to ask you a favor, Señor Broadhead. Is it possible that you would allow us to borrow your aircraft for a day or two? It is for the wounded," he explained, "since our own general hospital was unfortunately in the direct path of the loop cables."

I am ashamed to say I hesitated, but Essie did not. "Most certainly yes, *teniente*," she said. "Especially as we will need to make a reservation for another loop in any event before we know where we want to go to."

He beamed. "That, my dear Señora, we can arrange for you through the military communications. And my deepest thanks for your generosity!"

Services in the city were falling apart, but when we got back to our suite there were fresh flowers on the tables, and a basket of fruits and wine that had not been there before. The windows had been closed. When I opened them I found out why. Lake Tehigualpa wasn't a lake any more. It was just the heat sink where the ribbon was supposed to dump in case of the catastrophic failure of the loop that no one believed would ever happen. Now that it had happened the lake had boiled down to a mud wallow. Fog obscured the loop itself, and there was a stink of cooked mud that made me close the window again quickly enough.

We tried room service. It worked. They served us a really nice dinner, apologizing only because they couldn't send the wine steward up to decant our claret — he was in "Las Servicías emergencias de la República" and had had to report for duty. So had the suite's regular ladies' maid and, although they promised a regular floor maid would be up in an hour to unpack the bags for us, meanwhile they stood against the walls in the foyer.

I'm rich, all right; but I'm not spoiled. At least I don't think I am. But I do like service, especially the service of the fine computer programs Essie has written for me over the years. "I miss Albert," I said, looking out at the foggy night-time scene.

"Can find nothing to do without your toys, eh?" scoffed Essie, but she seemed to have something on her mind. She was smiling, though. She pursed her lips, thinking. Then she said: "I tell you what. You go fetch small traveling bag from foyer. I have a little present to give you, then we see."

Out of the bag came a box, silver-paper wrapped, and inside it a big Heechee prayer fan. It wasn't really Heechee, of course; it was the wrong size. It was one of the kind Essie had developed for her own use. "You remember Dead Men and Here After," she said. "Very good Heechee software, which I decided to steal. So have converted old data-retrieval program for you. Have in hand now guaranteed *real* Albert Einstein."

I turned the fan over in my hands, "The *real* Albert Einstein?"

"Oh, Robin, so literal! Not *real-real*. Cannot revive dead, especially so long dead. But real in personality, memories, thoughts — pretty near, anyway. Programmed search of every scrap of Einstein data. Books. Papers. Correspondence. Biographies. Interviews. Pictures. Everything. Even cracked old film clips from, what you called them, 'newsreels' on ship coming to New York City in A.D. 1932 by Pathé News. All inputted to here, and now when you talk to Albert Einstein it is Albert Einstein who talks back!" She leaned over and kissed the top of my head. "Then, to be sure," she bragged, "added some features real Albert Einstein never had. Complete pilotage of Heechee vessels. All update in science and technology since A.D. 1953, time of actual Einstein passing on. Even some simpler functions from cook, secretary, lawyer, medical programs. Was even room for Sigfrid von Shrink, though am sure you no longer need shrinkage, eh, Robin? Except for unaccountable lapse of memory."

She was looking at me with an expression that, over the past couple of decades, I had come to recognize. I reached out and pulled her toward me. "All right, Essie, let's have it."

She settled down in my lap and asked innocently, "Have what, Robin? You talking about sex again?"

"Come on!"

"Oh. . . . It is nothing, to be sure. I have already given you your silver gift."

"What, the program?" It was true that she had wrapped it in silver paper— Enlightenment exploded. "Oh, my God! I missed our silver wedding anniversary, didn't I? When—" But, thinking fast, I bit the question off.

"When was it?" she finished for me. "Why, now. Is still. Is today, Robin. Many congratulations and happy returns, Robin, dear."

I kissed her, I admit as much stalling for time as anything else, and she kissed me back, seriously. I said, feeling abject, "Essie, dear, I'm really sorry. When we get back I'll get you a gift that will make your hair stand on end, I promise."

But she pressed her nose against my lips to stop my talking. "Is no need to promise, dear Robin." she said, from about the level of my Adam's apple, "for you have given me ample gifts every day for twenty-five years now. Not counting couple years when we just fooled around, even. Of course," she added, lifting her head to look at me, "we are alone at this moment, just you and me and bed in next room, and will be for some hours yet. So if you truly wish to make hair stand on end with gift, would be pleased to accept. Happen to know you have something for me. Even in my size."

The fact that I didn't want any breakfast brought all of Essie's standby

systems up to full alert, but I explained it by saying that I wanted to play with my new toy. That was true. It was also true that I didn't always eat breakfast anyway; and those two truths sent Essie off to the dining hall without me; but the final truth, that my gut did not really feel all that good, was the one that counted.

So I plugged the new Albert into the processor, and there was a quick pinkish flare and there he was, beaming out at me. "Hello, Robin," he said, "and happy anniversary."

"That was yesterday," I said, a little disappointed. I had not expected to catch the new Albert in silly mistakes.

He rubbed the stem of his pipe across his nose, twinkling up at me under those bushy white eyebrows. "In Hawaiian Mean Time," he said, "it is, let me see —" he faked looking at a digital wristwatch that was anachronistically peeking out under his frayed pajama-top sleeve — "forty-two minutes after eleven at night, Robin, and your twenty-fifth wedding anniversary has still nearly twenty minutes to go." He leaned forward to scratch his ankle. "I have a good number of new features," he said proudly, "including full running time and location circuits, which operate whether I am in display mode or not. Your wife is really very good at this, you know."

Now, I know that Albert Einstein is only a computer program, but all the same it was like welcoming an old friend. "You're looking particularly well," I complimented. "I don't know if you should be wearing a digital watch, though. I don't believe you ever had such a thing before you died, because they didn't exist."

He looked a little sulky, but he complimented me in return: "You have an excellent grasp of the history of technology, Robin. However, although I *am* Albert Einstein, as near as may be to the real thing, I am not limited to the real Albert Einstein's capabilities. Mrs. Broadhead has included in my program all known Heechee records, for example, and that flesh-and-blood self didn't even know the Heechee existed. Also I have subsumed into me the programs of most of our colleagues, as well as data-seeking circuits which are presently engaged in trying to establish connection with the gigabit net. In that, Robin," he said apologetically, "I have not been successful, but I have patched into the local military circuits. Your launch from Lagos, Nigeria, is confirmed for noon tomorrow, and your aircraft will be returned to you in time to make the connection." He frowned. "Is something wrong?"

I hadn't been listening to Albert as much as studying him. Essie had done a remarkable job. There were none of those little lapses where he would start a sentence with a pipe in his hand, and finish by gesturing with a piece of chalk. "You do seem more real, Albert."

"Thank you," he said, showing off by pulling open a drawer of his desk to get a match to light his pipe. In the old days he would just have

materialized a book of matches. "Perhaps you'd like to know more about your ship?"

I perked up. "Any progress since we landed?"

"If there were," he apologized, "I wouldn't know it, because as I mentioned I have been unable to make contact with the net. However, I do have a copy of the certificate of commissioning from the Gateway Corp. It is rated as a Twelve — that is to say, it could carry twelve passengers if equipped for simple exploration —"

"I know what a Twelve would be, Albert."

"To be sure. In any event, it has been fitted for four passengers, although up to two others can be accommodated. It was test-flown to Gateway Two and back, performing optimally all the way. Good morning, Mrs. Broadhead."

I looked over my shoulder; Essie had finished breakfast and joined us. She was leaning over me to study her creation more carefully. "Good program," she complimented herself, and then, "Albert! From where you get this picking nose bit?"

Albert removed a finger from a nostril forgivingly. "From unpublished letters, Enrico Fermi to a relative in Italy; it is authentic, I assure you. Are there any other questions? No? Then, Robin and Mrs. Broadhead," he finished, "I suggest you pack, for I have just received word over the police link that your aircraft has landed and is being serviced. You can take off in two hours."

And so it was, and so we did, happily enough — or almost happily. The last little bit, less happily. We were just getting into our plane when there was a noise from behind the passenger terminal and we turned to look.

"Why," Essie said wonderingly, "that sounds like guns firing. And those big things in the parking lot, see them pushing aside cars? One has just now demolished a fire standpipe and water is shooting out. Can they be what I think?"

I tugged her into the plane. "They can," I said, "if what you think they are is army tanks. Let's get the Hell out of here."

We did. No problem. Not for us, anyway, even though Albert, listening in on the reopened gigabit net, reported that the teniente's worst fears had been realized and a revolution was indeed lustily tuning up. Not for us then, at least, though elsewhere in the wide universe other things were going on which would pose for us some very large problems, and some very painful ones, and some which were both.

* * *

When
Gelle-Klara
Moynlin
awoke



she was not dead, as she had confidently expected to be. She was in a Heechee exploration ship. It was an armored Five by the look of it, but not the one she had been in at the last she remembered.

What she remembered was chaotic, frightful, and filled with pain and terror. She remembered it very well. It had not included this lean, dark, scowling man who wore a G-string and a scarf and nothing else. Nor had it included some strange young blonde girl who was crying her eyes out. In the last memory Klara had there had been people crying, all right, oh, yes! And shrieking and cursing and wetting their underwear, because they were trapped within the Schwarzschild barrier of a black hole.

But none of those people were these people.

The young girl was bending over her solicitously. "Are you all right, hon? You've been through a real bad time." There was no news for Klara in that statement. She knew how bad the time had been. "She's awake," the girl called over her shoulder.

The man came bounding over, pushing the girl aside. He did not waste time inquiring about Klara's health. "Your name! Also orbit and mission number — quickly!" When she told him, he didn't acknowledge the answer. He simply disappeared and the blonde girl came back.

"I'm Dolly," she said. "I'm sorry I'm such a wreck, but honestly, I was scared to death. Are you all right? You were all messed up, and we don't have much of a medical program here."

Klara sat up and discovered that, yes, she was messed up, all right. Every part of her ached, starting with her head, which appeared to have been bashed against something. She looked around. She had never been in a ship so full of tools and toys before, nor one that smelled so pleasantly of cooking. "Look, where am I?" she asked.

"You're in his ship —" pointing. "His name's Wan. He's been wandering around, poking into black holes." Dolly looked as though she were getting ready to cry again, but rubbed her nose and went on: "And listen,

hon, I'm sorry, but all those other people you were with are dead. You were the only one alive."

Klara caught her breath. "All of them? Even Robin?"

"I don't know their names," the girl apologized. And was not surprised when her unexpected guest turned her bruised face away and began to sob. Across the room Wan snarled impatiently at the two women. He was deep into concerns of his own. He did not know what a treasure he had retrieved, or how much that retrieved treasure complicated my life.

For it is pretty nearly true that I married my dear wife, Essie, on the elastic rebound from the loss of Klara Moynlin. At least, on the upsurge of feeling that came when I shed the guilt, or anyway most of the guilt, I felt for Klara's loss.

When ultimately I found out that Klara was alive again it was a shock. But, my God, nothing — *nothing* — compared to the shock to Klara! Even now and in these circumstances I can't help feeling what I can only call, incongruously enough, a physical pain when I think about my whilom most dear Klara as she found herself back from the dead. It isn't just because of who she was, or who she was in relation to me. She deserved the compassion of anybody. Trapped, terrified, hurt, sure of dying — and then a moment later miraculously rescued. God pity the poor woman! God knows I do, and things did not quickly get better for her. She was unconscious half the time, because her body had taken a terrible battering. When she was awake she was not always sure she was awake. From the tingling she felt and the warm flush and the buzzing in her ears she knew that they had been shooting her full of painkillers. Even so she ached terribly. Not just in the body. And when she was awake she could easily have been hallucinating, as far as she was able to know, because the sociopath Wan and the demoralized Dolly were not very stable figures to cling to. When she asked questions she got strange answers. When she saw Wan talking to a machine and asked Dolly what he was doing, she could make little sense of Dolly's reply: "Oh, those are his Dead Men. He programmed them with all the mission records, and now he's asking them about you."

I had not met Gelle-Klara Moynlin before her accident with the black hole. Robin couldn't afford as sophisticated a data-retrieval system as myself in those days. But I surely heard a lot about her from Robin over the years. What I mostly heard about was how guilty he felt over her "death." The two of them, with others, had gone on a science mission for the Gateway Corp. to investigate a black hole; most of their ships had been trapped; Robin had managed to get free.

There was no logical reason to feel guilty, of course. Moreover Gelle-Klara Moynlin, though a normally competent female human, was in no sense irreplaceable — in fact, Robin replaced her rather swiftly with a succession of other females, finally bonding in a long-term mode with S. Ya. Lavorovna — not only a competent human female, but the one who designed me. Although I am well modeled on human drives and motivations, there are parts of human behavior I never will understand.

But what could that mean to someone who had never heard of Dead Men? And what could she feel when a wispy, uncertain voice from the speakers began to talk about herself?

“— no, Wan, there’s nobody named Schmitz on that mission. Either ship. You see, there were two ships that went out together, and —”

“I do not care how many ships went out together!”

The voice paused. Then, uncertainly, “Wan?”

“Of course I am Wan! Who would I be but Wan?”

“Oh. . . Well, no, there’s nobody there that fits your father’s description, either. Who did you say you rescued?”

“She claims to be named Gelle-Klara Moynlin. Female. Not very good-looking. About forty, maybe,” Wan said, not even looking at her to see how wrong he was; Klara stiffened, and then reflected that the ordeal had no doubt made her look older than her age.

“Moynlin,” the voice whispered. “Moynlin. . . Gelle-Klara, yes, she was on that mission. The age is wrong, though, I think.” Klara gave a half-nod, causing the throb in her head to start again, and then the voice went on. “Let me see, yes, the name is right. But she was born sixty-three years ago.”

The throbbing increased its tempo and its violence. Klara must have moaned, because the girl Dolly cried out to Wan and then leaned over her again. “You’re going to be all right,” she said, “but I’m going to get Henrietta to give you another little sleepy shot, all right? When you wake up again you’ll feel better.”

Klara gazed up at her without comprehension, then closed her eyes. Sixty-three years ago!

How many shocks can a human being stand without breaking? Klara was not very breakable; she was a Gateway prospector, four missions, all of them tough, any of them enough to give nightmares to anyone. But her head throbbed furiously as she tried to think. Time dilation? Was that the term for what happened inside a black hole? Was it possible that twenty or thirty years had sped past in the real world while she was spinning around the deepest gravity well there was?

"How about," Dolly offered hopefully, "if I get you something to eat?"

Klara shook her head. Wan, nibbling his lip in a surly way, lifted his head and called, "How foolish, offering her food! Give her a drink instead."

He was not the kind of person you would want to please even by agreeing with him when he was right, but it sounded like too good an idea to pass up. She let Dolly bring her what seemed to be straight whiskey; it made her cough and splutter, but it warmed her. "Hon," said Dolly hesitantly, "was one of those, you know, those guys that got killed, was he a special boy-friend?"

There was no reason for Klara to deny it. "Pretty much a boy-friend. I mean, we were in love, I guess. But we'd had a fight and split up, and then started to get together again, and then — And then Robin was in one ship, and I was in another —"

"Robbie?"

"No. Robin. Robin Broadhead. It was really Robinette, but he was kind of sensitive about the name — What's the matter?"

"Robin *Broadhead*. Oh, my God, yes," said Dolly, looking astonished and impressed. "The millionaire!"

And Wan looked over, then came to stand beside her. "Robin Broadhead, to be sure, I know him well," he boasted.

Klara's mouth was suddenly dry. "You do?"

"Of course. Certainly! I have known him for many years. Yes, of course," he said, remembering, "I have heard of his escape from the black hole years ago. How curious that you were there, too. We are business partners, you see. I receive from him and his enterprises nearly two-sevenths of my present income, including the royalties paid me by his wife's companies."

"His wife?" whispered Klara.

"Do you not listen? I said that, yes, his wife!" And Dolly, suddenly gentle again, said:

"I've seen her on the PV now and then. Like when they pick her for the Ten Best-Dressed Women, or when she won the Nobel Prize. She's quite beautiful. Hon? Would you like another drink?"

Klara nodded, starting her head to throbbing again, but collected herself enough to say, "Yes, please. Another drink, at least."

For nearly two days Wan elected to be benevolent to the former friend of his business partner. Dolly was kind and tried to be helpful. There was no picture of *S. Ya.* in their limited PV file, but Dolly pulled out the hand puppets to show her what a caricature of Essie, at least, looked like; and when Wan, growing bored, demanded she do her night-club routine with them, managed to fob him off. Klara found plenty of time to think. Dazed

and battered as she was, she could still do simple arithmetic in her head.

She had lost more than thirty years of her life.

No, not out of *her* life; out of everybody else's. She was no more than a day or two older than when she went into the naked singularity. The backs of her hands were scratched and bruised, but there were no age spots on them. Her voice was hoarse from pain and fatigue, but it was not an old woman's voice. She was not an old woman. She was Gelle-Klara Moynlin, not that much over thirty, to whom something terrible had happened.

When she woke up on the second day the sharpened pains and the localized aches told her that she was no longer receiving analgesia. The sullen-faced captain was bending over her. "Open your eyes," he snapped. "Now you are well enough to work for your passage, I think."

What an annoying creature he was! Still, she was alive, and apparently getting well, and there was gratitude due. "That sounds reasonable enough," Klara offered, sitting up.

"Reasonable? Ha! You do not decide what is reasonable here; I decide what is reasonable," Wan explained. "You have only one right on my ship. You had the right to be rescued and I rescued you; now all the other rights are mine. Especially as because of you we must now return to Gateway."

"Hon," said Dolly tentatively, "that's not entirely true. There's plenty of food —"

"Not the kind of food I wish, shut up. So you, Klara, must repay me for this trouble." He reached his hand behind him. Dolly evidently understood his meaning; she moved a plate of fresh-baked chocolate brownies to his fingers, and he took one and began to eat it.

Gross person! Klara pushed her hair out of her eyes, studying him coldly. "How do I repay you? The way she does?"

"Certainly the way she does," said Wan, chewing, "by helping her maintain the ship, but also — Oh! Ho! Ha-ha, that is funny," he gasped, spraying crumbs of chocolate on Klara as he laughed. "You think I meant in bed! How stupid you are, Klara, I do not copulate with ugly older women."

Klara wiped the crumbs off her face as he reached for another brownie. "No," he said seriously, "it is more important than that. I want to know all about black holes."

She said, trying to be placating, "It all happened very fast. There's not much I can tell you."

"Tell what you can tell, then! And listen, do not try to lie!"

Oh, my God, thought Klara, how much of this must I put up with? And "this" meant more than the bullying Wan, it meant all of her resumed and wholly disoriented life.

The answer to "how much" turned out to be eleven days. It was time enough for the worst of the bruises to fade from her arms and body, time enough for her to get to know Dolly Walthers and pity her, to know Wan and despise him. It was not time enough for her to figure out what to do with her life.

But her life did not wait until she was ready for it. Ready or not, Wan's ship docked on Gateway. And there she was.

The very smells of Gateway were different. The noise level was different — much louder. The people were *radically* different. There did not seem to be a single living one among them for Klara to recognize from her last time there — thirty years, or not much more than thirty days, in the past, depending on whose clock you timed by. Also, so many of them were in uniform.

That was quite new to Klara, and not at all pleasing. In the "old days" — however subjectively recent those old days were — you saw maybe one or two uniforms a day, crewpersons on leave from the four-power guard cruisers mostly. Certainly you never saw one of them carrying a weapon. That was not true any longer. They were everywhere, and they were armed.

Debriefing had changed along with everything else. It had always been a nuisance. You'd come back to Gateway filthy and exhausted and still scared, because up until the last minute you hadn't been sure you'd make it, and then the Gateway Corp. would sit you down with the evaluators and the data-compilers and the accountants. Just what did you find? What was new about it? What was it worth? The debriefing teams were the ones charged with answering questions like that, and how they scored a flight made the difference between abject failure and — once in a great while — wealth beyond dreaming. A Gateway prospector needed skills simply to survive, once he had closed himself into one of those unpredictable ships and launched himself on his Mad Magic Mystery Bus Ride. But to prosper he needed more than skills. He needed a favorable report from the debriefing team.

Debriefing had always been bad news, but now it was worse. There wasn't a debriefing team from the Gateway Corp. any more. There were four debriefing teams, one from each of the four guardian powers. The debriefing had been moved to what had once been the asteroid's principal night club and gambling casino, the Blue Hell, and there were four separate little rooms, each with a flag on the door. The Brazilians got Dolly. The People's Republic of China snatched Wan off the floor. The American M.P. took Klara by the arm, and when the lieutenant of M.P.s in front of the Soviet cubicle frowned and patted the butt of his Kalishnikov, the American scowled right back, his hand resting on his Colt.

It didn't really make any difference, because as soon as Klara was through with the Americans, the Brazilians took their turn with her, and

when you are invited somewhere by a young soldier with a sidearm it makes little difference whether it is a Colt or a Paz.

Between the Brazilians and the Chinese Klara crossed paths with Wan, sweating and indignant, on his way from the Chinese to the Russians, and realized she had something to be thankful for. The interrogators were rude, overbearing, and nasty with her, but they seemed to be even worse with Wan. For reasons she didn't know, each of his sessions was lasting twice as long as her own. Which were already very long. Each team in turn pointed out that she was supposed to be dead; that her bank account had long since reverted to the Gateway Corp.; that there was no mission payment due her for traveling with Juan Henriquette Santos-Schmitz, since it was not an officially authorized Gateway mission; and, as for any payment that might have been due for her trip to the black hole, well, she hadn't come back in that vessel, had she? With the Americans she claimed at least a science bonus — who ever else had been inside a black hole? They told her the matter would be taken under advisement. The Brazilians told her it was a matter for four-power negotiation. The Chinese said it all hinged on an interpretation of the award made to Robinette Broadhead, and the Russians had no interest in that subject at all, because what they wanted to know was whether Wan had given any indication of terrorist leanings.

The debriefing took forever, and then there was a medical check that took almost as long. The diagnostic programs had never encountered a living human being who had been exposed to the wrenching forces behind a Schwarzschild barrier before, and they would not let her go until they had pinpointed every bone and ligament, and helped themselves freely to samples of all the fluids she had. And then they released her to the accountancy section for her statement of account. It was a hard-copy chit, and all it said was:

MOYNLIN, Gelle-Klara

Current balance: 0.

Awards due: not yet evaluated.

Waiting outside the accountancy offices was Dolly Walthers, looking fretful and bored. "How'd you do, hon?" she asked. Klara made a face. "Oh, that's too bad. Wan's still in there," she explained, "because they kept him for bloody ever in the debriefing. I've been just sitting here for hours. What are you going to do now?"

"I don't exactly know," Klara said slowly, thinking about the very limited options one had on Gateway when she had no money.

"Yeah. Same here," sighed Dolly. "With Wan, you know, you never know. He can't stay anywhere very long, because they start asking questions about some of the stuff on his ship and I don't think he got it all

exactly legally." She swallowed and said quickly, "Watch it, here he comes."

To Klara's surprise, when Wan looked up from the chits he was studying he beamed at her. "Ah," he said, "my dear Gelle-Klara, I have been studying your legal position. Very promising indeed, I think."

Promising! She glared at him with considerable dislike. "If you mean that they'll probably toss me out into space within the next forty-eight hours for non-payment of bills, that's not what I call promising."

He peered at her, decided she was joking. "Ha-ha, that is very humorous. Since you are not used to dealing with large sums of money, permit me to recommend a banking chap I find very useful —"

"Cut it out, Wan. That's not funny."

"Of course it's not funny!" He scowled just as in the old days, and then his expression softened into incredulity. "Can it be — Is it possible — Have they not told you of your claim?"

"What claim?"

"Against Robinette Broadhead. My legal johnny says you might get quite fifty per cent of his assets."

"Oh, bullshit, Wan," she said impatiently.

"Not bullshit! I have an excellent legal program! It is the doctrine of the calf follows the cow, if you understand. You should have had a full share of the survivors' benefits from his last mission; now you should have an equal share of that, and also of all that he has added to it, since it came from that original capital."

"But — But — Oh, that's stupid," she snapped. "I'm not going to sue him."

"Of course sue him! What else? How else can you get what is yours? Why, I sue as many as two hundred persons a year, Gelle-Klara. And there is a very large sum involved indeed. Do you know what Broadhead's net worth is? Much, much more even than my own!" And then, with the jolly fraternal good-fellowship of one person of wealth to another, "Of course, there may be some inconvenience for you while the matter is being adjudicated. Allow me to transfer a small loan from my account to yours — one moment —" he made the necessary entries on his statement chit "— yes, there you are. Good luck!"

So there was my lost love, Gelle-Klara Moynlin, lost rather than ever after she had been found. She knew Gateway well. But the Gateway she knew was gone. Her life had skipped a beat; and everything she knew or cared for or was interested in had suffered the changes of a third of a century, while she, like some enchanted princess in a forest, had slept away the time. "Good luck," Wan had said, but what constituted good luck for the sleeping beauty whose prince had married someone else? "A small loan," Wan had said, and it turned out that was what he had meant. Ten

thousand dollars. Enough to pay her bills for a few days — and then what?

There was, thought Klara, the excitement of finding out some of the facts people like she had been dying for. So once she had found herself a room and gotten something to eat she headed for the library. It no longer contained spools of magnetic tape. Everything was now stored on some kind of second-generation Heechee prayer fans (the prayer fans! so that was what they were!), and she had to hire an attendant to teach her how to use them. ("Librarian services @ \$125/hr., \$62.50" said the item on her data chit.) Was it worth it?

To Klara's disgruntled surprise, not really. So many questions answered! And, strangely, so little joy in getting the answers.

When Klara was a Gateway prospector like any other, the questions were literally a matter of life and death. What were the meanings of the symbols on the control panels of Heechee ships? What settings meant death? What meant reward? Now here were the answers, not all of them, perhaps — there was still not much clue to that great shuddery question of who the Heechee were in the first place. But thousands upon thousands of answers, even answers to questions no one had known enough to ask thirty years' before.

I never knew Gelle-Klara Moynlin when Robin was romantically involved with her. For that matter, I didn't know Robinette Broadhead then, either, for he was too poor to afford so sophisticated a data-retrieval system as me. Although I cannot experience physical courage directly (since I don't even experience physical fear), I estimate theirs very highly. Their ignorance, almost as high. They didn't know what drove their cast-off FTL ships. They didn't know how the navigation worked, or what the controls did. They didn't know how to read Heechee charts, and didn't have any to read anyway, because they weren't found for another decade after Klara was sucked into the black hole. It is astonishing to me how much meat intelligences can accomplish with so little information.

But the answers gave her little pleasure. The questions lost their urgency when you knew the answers were in the back of the book.

The one class of questions whose answers held her interest was, I know, me.

Robinette Broadhead? Oh, surely. There was much data on him in store. Yes, he was married. Yes, he was still alive, and even well. Unforgivably, he gave every indication of being happy. Almost as bad, he was *old*. He was not wizened or decrepit, of course, and his scalp still had all its

hair and his face was wrinkle-free, but that was just Full Medical, unfailing purveyor of health and youth to those who could afford it. Robinette Broadhead could obviously afford anything. But he was older all the same. There was a solid thickness to the neck, an assurance to the smile that looked out at her from the PV image, that had not been part of the frightened, confused man who had broken her tooth and sworn to love her always. So now Klara had a quantitative estimate for one more term: "Always." It meant a period substantially less than thirty years.

When she had depressed herself sufficiently in the library she roamed about Gateway to see what changes had occurred. The asteroid had become more impersonal and more civilized. There were many commercial enterprises on Gateway now. A supermarket, a fast-food franchise, a stereotheater, a health club, handsome new tourist pensions, glittering souvenir shops. There was plenty to do on Gateway now. But not for Klara. The only thing that attracted her interest, really, was the big gambling casino in the spindle, the Blue Hell; but such luxuries she could not afford.

She could not afford much of anything, really, and she was depressed. The lady magazines of her adolescence had been full of giggly little tricks to combat depression — what they called "the blahs." Clean your sink. Call somebody on the PV. Wash your hair. But she had no sink, and who was there to call on Gateway? After she had washed her hair for the third time she began to think of the Blue Hell again. A few small bets, she decided, would do no harm to her budget even if she lost — it would only mean, really, giving up a few luxuries for a bit. . . .

In eleven spins of the roulette wheel she was penniless.

A party of Gabonian tourists was just leaving, laughing and stumbling, and behind them, at the short, narrow bar, Klara saw Dolly. She walked over to her steadily and said, "Would you like to buy me a drink?"

"You bet," said Dolly unenthusiastically, waving to the barman.

"Then could you lend me some money?"

Dolly laughed with surprise. "Lost your stake, did you? Boy, have you got a wrong number! I wouldn't be buying drinks if some of the tourists hadn't thrown me a couple of chips for luck." When the highball arrived Dolly divided the small change in front of her in half and pushed a part to Klara. "You could hit Wan up again," she said, "but he's not in a very good mood."

"That's not news," said Klara, hoping the whiskey would elevate her spirits. It did not.

"Oh, worse than usual. I think he's going to be in the deep shit again." She hiccupped and looked surprised.

"What's the matter?" Klara asked reluctantly. She knew perfectly well that once she asked the girl would tell her, but it was, she supposed, a way

of paying for the loose change.

"They're going to catch up with him sooner or later," Dolly said, sucking at the bottle again. "He's such a jerk, coming here when he could have dropped you off anywhere, and got his goddam candy and cake."

"Well, I'd rather be here than some other place," said Klara, wondering if it were true.

"Don't be silly. He didn't do it for you. He did it because he thinks he can get away with anything at all, anywhere. Because he's a jerk." She stared moodily at the bottle. "He even makes love like a jerk. Jerky, if you know what I mean? He does it jerky, too. He comes up to me with that look on his face as if he's trying to remember the combination to the food locker, you know? And then he gets my clothes off, and then he starts, push here, poke there, wiggle this part. I think I ought to write up an operating manual for him. The jerk."

How many drinks the little stake lasted for Klara didn't know — several, anyway. At some later time Dolly remembered that she was supposed to shop for brownie mix and liqueur chocolates. At a later time still Klara, now strolling around by herself, realized she was hungry. What made her know it was the smell of food. She still had some of Dolly's loose change in her pocket. It was not enough for a decent meal, and anyway the sensible thing would be to go back to her cubicle and eat the prepaid meals, but what was the point of being sensible any more? Besides the smell was nearby. She passed through a sort of archway of Heechee metal, ordered at random and sat as close as she could get to a wall. She pried the sandwich apart with a finger to see what she was eating; probably synthetic, but not any product of the food mines or sea farms she had ever tasted before. Not bad. Not *very* bad, anyway, although there was no dish she could think of that would have tasted really good just then. She ate slowly, analyzing each bite, not so much because the food justified it as because doing that postponed the next thing she would have to do, namely contemplate what she was going to do with the rest of her life.

And she became aware of a stir. The busgirl was sweeping the floor twice as diligently, peering over her shoulder at every stroke of the broom; the counter people were standing straighter, speaking more clearly. Someone had come in.

It was a woman, tall, not young, handsome. Thick ropes of tawny hair hung down her back, and she was conversing pleasantly, but authoritatively, with staff and customers alike, while she rubbed fingers under shelves to check for grease, tasted crusts to check for crispness, made sure the napkin holders were full, retied the apron strings on the busgirl.

Klara stared at her with dawning recognition that felt more like fear. Her! The one! The woman whose picture she had seen in so many of the news stories the library had produced about Robinette Broadhead. S. Ya.

Lavarovna-Broadhead opens 54 new CHON-food outlets in Persian Gulf. S. Ya. Lavarovna-Broadhead to christen converted interstellar transport. S. Ya. Lavarovna-Broadhead directs programming of expanded datastore net.

Although the sandwich was just about the last crumb of food Klara could afford to buy, she could not force herself to finish it. She sidled toward the door, face averted, crammed the plate into the waste receptacle and was gone.

There was only one place to go. When she saw that Wan was alone in it she took it as a direct message from Providence that she had made the right decision. "Where's Dolly?" she asked.

He was lying in a hammock, sulkily nibbling on fresh papaya — bought at what incredible cost, Klara could not imagine. He said, "Where indeed, yes, I would like to know that too! I will deal with her when she comes back, oh, yes!"

"I lost my money," she told him.

He shrugged contemptuously.

"And," she lied, inventing as she went along, "I came to tell you that you've lost, too. They're going to impound your ship."

"Impound!" he screeched. "The animals! The bastards! Oh, when I see Dolly, believe me — she must have told them about my special equipment!"

"Or you did," Klara said brutally, "because you've sure been shooting your mouth off. You only have one chance."

"One chance?"

"*Maybe* one chance, if you're smart enough and courageous enough."

"Smart enough! Courageous enough! You forget yourself, Klara! You forget that for the first part of my life I was all alone —"

"No, I don't forget anything," she said wearily, "because you sure don't let me. It's what you do next that counts. Are you all packed, ship's stores all on board?"

"Stores? No, of course not. Have I not told you? Ice cream, yes, candy bars, yes, but my brownie mix and chocolates —"

"The hell with the chocolates," said Klara, "and since she's not here when she's needed, the hell with Dolly, too. If you want to keep your ship, take off *now*."

"Now? Alone? Without Dolly?"

"With a substitute," said Klara tightly. "Cook, bedmate, somebody to yell at — I'm available. And skilled. Maybe I can't cook as well as Dolly, but I can make love better. Or anyway more often. And you don't have time to think it over."

He stared at her slackjawed for a long moment. Then he grinned. "Take those cases on the floor," he ordered, "also that package under the hammock. Also —"

"Wait a minute," she objected. "There's a limit to what I can carry, you know."

"As to what your limits are," he said, "we will discover in time, I assure you. Now you may not argue, simply take that netting and fill it and then we go, and while you are doing so I will tell you a story I heard from the Dead Men many years ago. There were these two prospectors who discovered a great prize inside a black hole, and could not think how to get it out. One said finally, 'Ah, now I know. I have brought my pet kitten along. We will simply tie her to the treasure and she will pull it out.' And the second prospector said, 'Oh, what a fool you are! How can a little kitten pull a treasure out of a black hole?' And the first prospector said, 'No, it is you who are the fool. It will be easy, for, see, I have a whip.' "



Gateway
gave
me

all of my many millions, but it also gives me the creeps. Coming there was like meeting myself coming back. I met myself as a young, dead-broke, terrified, despairing human being whose only choices lay between leaving on a trip that might kill him and staying in a place where no one would want to live. It hadn't changed that much. No one would still want to live there, although people did and tourists were in and out all the time. But at least the trips were not as recklessly dangerous as they used to be. As we were docking I told my program Albert Einstein that I had made a philosophical discovery, namely that things even out. Gateway gets safer, and the whole home planet Earth gets more perilous. "Maybe there is a sort of law of conservation of misery that insures an average quantum value of unhappiness for every human being, and all we can really do is spread it in one direction or another?"

"It is when you say things like that, Robin," he sighed, "that I wonder if my diagnostic programs are as good as they ought to be. Are you sure you're not in pain from your operation?" He was, or appeared to be, sitting on the edge of the seat, guiding our vessel into landing as he talked, but I knew that his question was rhetorical. He was monitoring me all along, of course.

As soon as the ship was secured I unplugged the Albert data-fan, tucked it under my arm and headed for my new ship. "No sightseeing?" Essie asked, studying me with almost the exact expression Albert had displayed. "Then you want me to come with?"

"I'm really excited about the ship," I said, "and I just want to go look at it. You can meet me there later." I knew she was eager to see how her beloved franchise was getting along in this location. Of course, I did not then know who she might run into.

So I was thinking about nothing in particular as I clambered through the hatch into my own, personal, human-built interstellar space yacht, and be damned if it didn't turn out that I was just about as excited as I had told Essie I was. I mean, talk about childhood fantasies come true! It was real. And it was all mine, and it had everything.

One of the lesser artifacts the Heechee left around was the "anisokinetic punch" — a simple tool that could convert an impact to an equal force at some angle to the driving force. The theory of it turned out to be both profound and elegant. The use people made of it, less so — the most popular product made with anisokinetic materials was a bedding mattress with "springs" whose force was vector rather than scalar, producing what is said to be a titillating support for sexual activity. Sexual activity! How much time meat intelligences waste on that sort of thing!

At least, it had almost everything. It had a master stateroom with a marvelously wide anisokinetic bed and a genuine toilet next door. It had a fully stocked larder and something very like a real kitchen. It had a guest stateroom, and it also had two working cabins, one for Essie and one for me, that could provide concealed berths for more guests in case we ever wanted company. It had the first human-built drive system ever to be successfully proved out for a civilian faster-than-light vessel — well, some of the parts were Heechee, salvaged out of damaged exploration ships, but most of it was human-made. And it was *powerful*, with a bigger, faster drive. It had a home for Albert, a fan-socket with his name engraved over it; I slipped him into place but did not activate him because I was enjoying my solitary prow. It had data-fans full of music and PV-plays and reference works and specialist programs to do almost everything I might ever want to do, or that Essie might, either. It had a view screen copied from the one on the big *S. Ya.* transport, ten times the size of the little blurry plates in the exploration ships. It had everything I had ever thought of wanting in a ship, in fact, and the only thing it didn't have was a name.

I sat on the edge of the big anisokinetic bed, the thrust feeling funny on my bottom because it was all exerted upward instead of that constricting sideways squeeze you get from regular mattresses, and I thought about that problem. It was a good place to do it, since the person who would occupy that bed with me was the one I wanted to name the ship after. However, I had already named the transport after her.

Of course, I thought, there were ways of dealing with that. I could call it the *Semya*. Or the *Essie*. Or the *Mrs. Robinette Broadhead*, for that matter, although that was pretty stupid.

The matter was fairly urgent. We were all set to go. There was nothing to keep us on Gateway, except that I couldn't face taking off in a ship that didn't have a name. I found myself in the control cabin, and dropped into the pilot seat. This one was built for a human bottom, and in that way alone an immense improvement over the old style.

When I was a kid in the food mines I used to sit on a kitchen chair, in front of the radar oven, and make believe I was piloting a Gateway ship to the far corners of the universe. What I did now was just about the same thing. I reached out and touched the course wheels and made believe to squeeze the initiator teat and — and — well, I fantasized. I imagined myself dashing through space in just the same careless, adventurous, penalty-free style I had imagined as a child. Circling quasars. Speeding out to the nearby alien galaxies. Entering the silicon dust shroud around the core. Meeting a Heechee! Entering a black hole —

The fantasy collapsed then, because that was too personally real, but I suddenly realized I had a name for the ship. It fit *Essie* perfectly, but did not duplicate the one on the *S. Ya.*:

True Love.

It was the perfect name!

That being so, why did it leave me feeling vaguely sentimental, love-lorn, melancholy?

It was not a thought that I wanted to pursue. Anyway, now that a name had been decided, there were things to do: the registry had to be amended, the ship's insurance papers had to be corrected — the world had to be notified of my decision. The way to do that was to tell Albert to get it done. So I rocked the data-fan that held him to make sure it was firmly seated and turned him on.

I had not got used to the new Albert, so it surprised me when he turned up, not in a holograph box, not even near his data fan, but in the doorway to the main cabin. He stood there with an elbow cupped in a palm, the pipe in the free hand, gazing peacefully around for all the world as though he had just come in. "A beautiful ship, Robin," he said. "My congratulations."

"I didn't know you could jump around like that!"

"I am in fact *not* jumping around, my dear Robin," he pointed out

amiably. "It is part of my program to give to the maximum extent possible the simulation of reality. To appear like a genie out of a bottle would not seem realistic, would it?"

"You're a neat program, Albert." I smiled; he smiled back and said:

"And an alert one too, if I may say so, Robin. For example, I believe your good wife is coming this way now." He stepped aside — quite unnecessarily! — as Essie came in, panting and looking as though she were trying not to look upset.

"What's the matter?" I demanded, suddenly alarmed.

She didn't answer right away. "Haven't heard, then?" she said at last.

"Heard what?"

She looked both surprised and relieved. "Albert? You have not acquired linkage with data net?"

"I was just about to do so, Mrs. Broadhead," he said politely.

"No! Do not! There is — ah — there are some adjustments in bias must make for Gateway conditions first." Albert pursed his lips thoughtfully but did not speak; I was not so reticent.

"Essie, spit it out! What is it?"

She sat down on the communicator's bench, fanning herself. "That rogue Wan," she said. "Is here! Is talk of entire asteroid complex, I am astonished you have not heard. Woosh! I ran so! I was afraid you would be upset."

I smiled forgivingly. "The operation was weeks ago, Essie," I reminded her. "I'm not that delicate — or that likely to get all in an uproar over Wan, for that matter. Have a little more confidence in me!"

She looked at me narrowly, then nodded. "Is true," she admitted. "Was foolish. Well, I get back to work," she went on, standing up and moving to the door. "But remember, Albert — no interfacing with net until I come back!"

"Wait!" I cried. "You haven't heard my news." She paused long enough to let me say proudly, "I've found a name for the ship. The *True Love*. What do you think?"

She took a long time to think that over, and her expression was a lot more tentative, and a lot less delighted, than I might have expected. Then she said, "Yes, is very good name, Robin. God bless her and all who sail in her, eh? Now must go."

After twenty-five years I still did not entirely understand Essie. I told Albert so. He was sitting at his ease on Essie's dressing-table bench, observing himself in the mirror, and he shrugged. "Do you suppose she didn't like the name?" I asked him. "It's a good name!"

"I should have thought so, Robin," he agreed, experimenting with different expressions in the mirror.

"And she didn't seem to want to look at the ship!"

"She appeared to have something on her mind," he agreed.

"But what? I swear," I repeated, "I don't always understand her."

"I confess that I do not either, Robin. In my case," he said, turning from the mirror to twinkle at me, "I have assumed that it is because I am mechanical and she is human. I wonder what it is in your case?"

I stared at him, a little annoyed, and then grinned. "You're pretty funny in your new programming, Albert," I told him. "What do you get out of pretending to look in a mirror when I know you don't really see anything that way?"

"What do you get out of looking at the *True Love*, Robin?"

"Why do you always answer a question with a question?" I responded, and he laughed out loud. It was really a very convincing performance. As long as I've had the Albert program, he was able to laugh, and even make jokes of his own; but you always knew it was a picture laughing. You could think it was a picture of a real person if you wanted to — let's face it, I usually did — like the picture of a person on the PV-phone. But there was no, what shall I call it? No *presence*. Now there was. I couldn't smell him. But I could perceive his physical presence in the room with more senses than simple sight and hearing. Temperature? Mass sensation? I don't know. Whatever it is that tells you somebody is there with you.

"The answer really," he said, sobering, "is that this appearance is my equivalent of a new ship, or a new Sunday-go-to-meeting suit, or whatever analogy you like to give it. I'm just sort of looking it over to see how much I like it. How do *you* like it, which is after all more important?"

"Don't be humble, Albert," I told him. "I like it very well, only I wish you were hooked up to the data nets. I'd like to know if any of the people I've been working on have done anything about the terrorist data, for instance."

"I will of course do what you order me to, Robin," he said, "but Mrs. Broadhead was very explicit."

"No, I don't want you blowing yourself up or damaging your subroutines. I know what I'll do," I said, getting up as the light bulb flashed over my head. "I'll just go out into the passageway and plug into a comm circuit — provided," I joked, "I haven't forgotten how to make a call all by myself."

"Why, of course you could do that," he said. His tone was troubled, for some reason or other. "It isn't necessary, though, Robin."

"Well, no," I said, pausing halfway to the door. "But I am curious, you know."

"As to your curiosity," he said, smiling at me as he poked tobacco into the bowl of his pipe — but it was a forced smile, I thought. "As to that, you must know that until we docked I was in constant touch with the net. There was no real news. It is possible, though, that the lack of news was itself interesting. Even encouraging."

I was not entirely used to the new Albert. I sat down again, regarding him. "You're a cryptic son of a bitch, Dr. Einstein," I told him.

"Only when reporting information which is itself quite unclear," he smiled. "General Manzbergen is not receiving calls from you just now. The Senator says he has done all he can. Maitre Ijsinger says that Kwiatkowski and our friend from Malaysia have not responded to efforts to contact them on your behalf, and all he got from the Albanians was a message that said 'Don't worry.' "

"So something's happening!" I cried, jumping up again.

"Something *may* be happening," he corrected, "and if so, really, all we can do is let it happen. In any case, Robin," he said, his tone wheedling now, "I would personally prefer that you not leave the ship at this time. For one good reason, how do you know there is not some other person here with a gun and your name on a list?"

"A terrorist? Here?"

"Here or in Rotterdam, why is one more unlikely than the other? I beg to remind you, Robin, that I am not without experience in these matters. The Nazis put on my head a price of twenty thousand marks at one time; be sure I was careful not to let anyone earn it!"

Although it is interesting to see myself from Robin's point of view, it is not very enjoyable. Mrs. Broadhead's programming constrained me to speak, act and even think as the original Albert Einstein would have done, had he survived to assume my role. Robin seems to think grotesque. In a sense, he is right. Human beings **are** grotesque!

That came out of left field. I stopped in the doorway. "The whatzis?"

"The Nazis, Robin. A group of terrorists who seized control of the nation of Germany many years ago, when I was alive."

"When you were *what*?"

"I mean, of course," he shrugged, "when the real human being whose name you have given me was alive, but from my point of view that is not a distinction worth making." He stuffed the filled pipe in his pocket absently and sat down in such a natural, friendly way that automatically I sat down again too.

"I guess I haven't quite got used to the new you, Albert," I said.

"There's no better time than the present, Robin," he smiled, preening himself. He did have more solidity to him. The old holograms showed him in a dozen or so characteristic poses, with baggy sweater or tee-shirt, socks on or off, sneakers or slippers, pipe or pencil. Today he wore a tee-shirt, to be sure, but over it was a baggy cardigan; a button on it read

Two Per Cent. A faint pale stubble around the chin suggested he hadn't shaved that morning. Well, of course he hadn't shaved! He never would, either, being nothing more than a holographic projection of a computer construct — but so convincing and jazzy that I almost offered to lend him my razor!

I laughed and shook my head. "What does 'Two Per Cent' mean?"

"Ah," he said bashfully, "it was a slogan of my youth. If two per cent of the human race would refuse to fight, there would be no war."

"Do you believe that now?"

"I hope that, Robin," he corrected. "The news is not all that conducive to hope, I must admit. Would you like to know the rest of the news?"

"I suppose I should," I said, and watched him stroll over to Essie's vanity. He sat on the bench before it, idly fingering her flasks of perfume and bits of feminine decoration as he talked; so normal, so human, that it distracted me from what he was saying. That was well, for the news was all bad. The terrorists were busier than ever. The destruction of the Lofstrom loop had indeed been the first move in an insurrection, and a small, bloody war was going on all over that part of South America. Terrorists had dumped botulinus toxin into the Staines reservoir and London was going thirsty. News like that I did not want, and I told him so.

He sighed and agreed. "It was a gentler day when I was alive," he said wistfully. "Though not perfect, to be sure. I could perhaps have been president of the state of Israel, did you know that, Robin? Yes. But I felt I could not accept. I was for peace always, and a state must sometimes make war. Loeb once told me that all politicians must be pathological, and I fear he was right." He sat up straighter, and brightened. "But there is some good news after all, Robin! The Broadhead Awards for Scientific Discovery —"

"The what?"

"You recall, Robin," he said impatiently, "the system of awards you authorized me to inaugurate just before your operation. They have already begun to bear fruit."

"You've solved the mystery of the Heechee?"

"Ah, Robin, I perceive you are joking with me," he said in gentle reproof. "Of course, nothing so vast just yet. But there is a physicist in Laguna Beach — Beckfurt? You know his work? The one who proposed a system for achieving flat space?"

"No. I don't even know what flat space is."

"Well," he said, resigning himself to my ignorance, "that doesn't matter just now, I think, but he is now working on a mathematical analysis of the missing mass. It appears, Robin, that the phenomenon is quite recent! Somehow mass has been added to the universe, within the last few million years!"

"Oh, wow," I said, attempting to look comprehending. I did not deceive him. He said patiently:

"If you recall, Robin, some years ago the Dead Man — the woman, that is — from what is now the *S. Ya. Broadhead* led us to believe that this phenomenon had something to do with an act of the Heechee. We discounted this at the time, since there seemed to be no reason for it."

"I remember," I said, only partly untruthfully. I did remember that Albert had had the wild idea that for some reason, not specified, the Heechee were collapsing the universe back to its primordial atom, so as to bring about a new Big Bang and thus a new universe with somewhat different physical laws. Then he had changed his mind. He had surely explained all the reasoning to me at the time, but I had surely not retained it. "Mach?" I said. "Something about this fellow Mach? And somebody named Davies?"

"Exactly right, Robin!" he applauded, beaming on me with delight. "Mach's Hypothesis suggested a reason for doing it, but Davies's Paradox made it unlikely that the reason would work. Now Beckfurt has shown analytically that Davies's Paradox need not apply, only assuming that the number of expansions and contractions of the universe is finite!" He got up and roamed around the room, too pleased with himself to sit still. I could not see what he was rejoicing over.

Robin did not quite understand Davies's Paradox, but then he didn't even understand the more famous Olbers's Paradox, which bothered astronomers way back in the Nineteenth Century. Olbers said: If the universe is infinite, there should be an infinite number of stars. That means that we should see not individual stars in a black sky, but a solid dome of starlight, blinding white. And he proved it mathematically. (What he didn't know was that the stars were grouped into galaxies, which changed the mathematics.) So a century later Paul Davies said: If it's true that the universe is cyclical, expanding and contracting over and over, then if it is possible for a little bit of matter or energy to stay out of the crunch and cross over to the next universe, then in infinite time that left-over light would increase infinitely and we'd have an Olbers sky again. What **he** didn't know was that the number of oscillations in which a little bit of the energy was left out was not infinite. We happened to be in the very first of them.

"Albert," I said unsteadily, "are you telling me that it may be so that the universe is coming crashing around our ears, and we'll all be squeezed into — what do you call it? — phloem?"

"Exactly, my dear boy!"

"And this makes you *happy*?"

"Precisely! Oh," he said, coming to a halt at the doorway and gazing at me, "I see your problem. It will not happen *soon*. A matter of at least some billions of years, to be sure."

I sat back, staring at him. This new Albert was going to take some getting used to. He did not seem to notice anything amiss; he was babbling on happily about all the half-baked notions that had been pouring in on him ever since the awards were announced, and what interesting notions *he* had thought of because of them.

Thought of?

"Wait a minute," I said, frowning, because there was something I didn't quite understand. "When?"

"When what, Robin?"

"When were you doing this thinking? You've been turned off, except when we've been talking —"

"Exactly, Robin. When I was 'turned off,' as you put it," he twinkled.

"Now that Mrs. Broadhead has provided me with a hardwired, built-in data base, I do not cease to exist when you dismiss me, you know."

"I didn't know," I said.

"And it is such a great pleasure to me, you have no idea! Simply to think! All of my life it is what I have most wanted. As a young man I would weep for the chance to sit and only think — to do such things, for example, as reconstructing proofs of well known mathematical and physical theorems. Now I can do it very often, and so much more quickly than when I was alive! I am deeply grateful to your wife for this." He cocked an ear. "And here she is coming again, Robin," he said. "Mrs. Broadhead? I have just remembered to express to you my gratitude for this new programming."

She looked at him in a puzzled way, then shook her head. "Dear Robin," she said, "I have something I must tell you. One moment." She turned to Albert and shot three or four fast Russian sentences at him. He nodded, looking grave.

It takes me a long time to see what is before me sometimes, but by now it was evident. Something was going on that I should know about. "Come on, Essie," I said, alarmed, and even more alarmed because I didn't know what I was alarmed about. "What's happening? Has Wan done something?"

She said soberly, "Wan has left Gateway, and not a moment too soon, to be sure, since is in trouble with Gateway Corp, and with many others as well. But is not of Wan I wish to speak. Is of woman I observed in my shop. She did closely resemble, dear Robin, woman whom you loved before me, named Gelle-Klara Moynlin. So close that I thought perhaps a daughter."

I stared at her. "What — How do you know what Klara looked like, anyway?"

"Oh, Robin," she said impatiently. "Twenty-five years and I a specialist in data retrieval. You think I would not arrange to know? Know her exactly, Robin. Every datum on record."

"Yes, but — she never had a daughter, you know." I stopped, suddenly wondering if indeed I would know. I had loved Klara very much, but not for very long. It was quite possible there were things in her history she had not got around to telling me.

"Actually," said Essie apologetically, "first guess was maybe she was your own daughter. Only theory, you know. But was possible. Could have knocked lady up, you know. But now —" She turned to Albert questioningly. "Albert? Have completed search?"

"I have, Mrs. Broadhead," he nodded, looking grave. "There is nothing in Gelle-Klara Moynlin's record to suggest she ever bore a child."

"And?"

He reached for his pipe and fumbled with it. "There is no question about the identity, Mrs. Broadhead. She checked in two days ago, with Wan."

Essie sighed. "Then," she said bravely, "is no doubt at all. Woman in shop was Klara herself, no impostor."

At that moment, trying to take in what I had been told, what I wished for most in the world, or at that moment most urgently at any rate, was to be alone in the soothing, healing presence of my old analysis program, Sigfrid von Shrink. I needed help.

Klara? Alive? Here? And if this impossibility was true, what should I do about it?

It was easy enough for me to tell myself I owed Klara nothing I had not already paid. The coin I paid in was a long time of mourning, a deep and abiding love, a sense of loss that even three decades had not entirely cured. She had been taken away from me, across a gulf I could not span, and the only thing that made that bearable to me was that I had finally come to believe that it was Not. My. Fault.

But the gulf had somehow spanned itself. Here she was! And here was I, with a well-established wife and a well-ordered life, and no room in it for the woman I had promised to love exclusively and always.

"Is more," said Essie, watching my face.

I was not keeping up with the conversation very well. "Yes?"

"Is more. Wan arrived with two women, not one. Second woman was Dolly Walthers, unfaithful wife of person we saw in Rotterdam, you know? Young person. Weeping, eye makeup smeared — pretty young woman, but not in pretty frame of mind. U.S. military police arrested her

when Wan left without clearance, so I went to talk to her."

"Dolly Walthers?"

"Oh, Robin, listen to me, please! Yes, Dolly Walthers. Could tell me very little, though, because MPs had other plans for her. Americans wanted to take her to High Pentagon, Brazilian MPs tried to stop them. Big argument, but Americans finally won."

I nodded to show I was comprehending. "I see. The Americans have arrested Dolly Walthers."

Essie studied me sharply. "Are you all right, Robin?"

"Certainly I'm all right. I'm only a little worried because if there's friction between the Americans and the Brazilians I hope it doesn't keep them from putting their data together."

"Ah," said Essie, nodding, "now is clear. Could tell you were worried about something, was not sure what it was." And then she bit her lip. "Excuse me please, dear Robin. I am a little upset too, I think."

She sat down on the edge of the bed, twitching irritably as the anisokinetic mattress poked at her. "Practical matters first," she said, frowning. "What do we do now? These are alternatives. One, go off to investigate object Walthers detected, as planned. Two, attempt to discover more information about Gelle-Klara Moynlin. Three, eat something and get good night's sleep before doing anything else — for," she added reprovingly, "must not forget, Robin, you are still somewhat convalescent from major abdominal surgery. I personally lean toward third alternative, what do you think?"

As I was mulling over this difficult question Albert cleared his throat. "Mrs. Broadhead? It has occurred to me that it would not be very expensive, a few hundred thousand dollars perhaps, to charter a One for a few days and send it on a photo-reconnaissance mission." I peered at him, trying to follow his meaning. "That is," he explained, "we could have it seek the object you are interested in, locate it, observe it and report to us. Single-passenger ships are not in great demand now, I believe, and at any rate there are several available here on Gateway."

"What a good idea!" Essie cried. "Settled then, all right? Arrange same, Albert, and at same time cook us up something delicious for first meal on, ah, on new ship *True Love*."

I ate abstractedly; slept; woke and fretted; then I drifted off to sleep once more. When I woke again I was not alone. "Good morning, Essie," I said, reaching out for her hand.

"Good morning," she said, pressing my hand to her cheek in the fond, familiar way. But she had an unfamiliar subject to discuss. "Are feeling all right, Robin? Good. I have been thinking about your situation."

"I see," I said. I could feel myself tensing up; the peaceful relaxation was being nibbled away. "What situation is that?"

"The Klara Moynlin situation, to be sure," she said. "I see is difficult for you, Robin dear."

"Oh," I said vaguely, "these things happen." It was not a situation I could discuss easily with Essie, but that didn't stop Essie from trying to discuss it with me.

"Dear Robin," she said, her voice calm and her expression gentle in the dim night light of the room, "is no use your keeping all this to self. Bottle up, it will explode."

I squeezed her hand. "Have you been taking lessons from Sigfrid von Shrink? That's what he always used to tell me."

"Is good program, Sigfrid. Please believe, I understand what is in your heart."

"I know you do, only —"

"Only," she nodded, "is embarrassing to talk of this with me, who am Other Woman in case. Without whom would be no problem."

"That's not true, damn it!" I had not intended to yell, but maybe there was, after all, something bottled up.

"Incorrect, Robin. Is true. If I did not exist could go look for Klara, no doubt find her, then decide what to make of this worrying situation. Might become lovers again. Might not — is young woman, Klara, might not want raddled old spare-parts wreck for lover, eh? I foreclose this option. I am sorry."

She thought for a moment, then corrected herself. "No, is not true; I am not a bit sorry we love each other. Value that very greatly — but problem remains. Only, Robin! There is no guilt in this for anyone! You deserve none, I accept none, certainly Klara Moynlin has earned none. So all guilt, worry, fear, is all in your head. No, Robin, do not mistake me; what is in head can hurt very powerfully, especially for person with well developed conscience like you. But is paper tiger. Blow on it, it goes away. Problem is not Klara's reappearance, problem is you feel guilt."

It was very apparent that I had not been the only one to sleep poorly; obviously Essie had been rehearsing this speech for some time.

I sat up, and sniffed the air. "Is that coffee you brought in with you?"

"Only if you want, Robin."

"I want." I thought for a minute, while she was handing me the bottle. "You're certainly right," I said. "I know this. What I don't know, as Sigfrid used to say, is how to integrate this knowledge into my life."

"Sigfrid? Knew it! You have Sigfrid on your mind. Well, good-as-new, maybe improved Sigfrid is at your service. But think! Integration, you say. Is not your life alone, but our lives! Integrate them together. What is Sigfrid to you, then?"

"A listener . . . one who unravels tangled threads . . ."

"Indeed, love. That is center of this conversation, correct?" Essie bent forward to give me a swift kiss, then looked concerned. "Oh, wait, Robin,

I withdraw that kiss. For what I wish to say is this: In psychoanalytical shrinkery, as you have so often explained to me, the analyst is not important. What is important is what happens in the head of analysand, e.g., you. So the analyst can be machine, even very rudimentary machine; or dolt with bad breath; or human with doctoral degree . . . or even me."

"You!"

She winced. "Have heard more flattering tone from you," she complained.

"You're going to psychoanalyze me?"

She shrugged defensively. "Yes, me, why not? As friend. As *good* friend, intelligent, wishing to listen, I promise not judgmental in the least. I *promise* this, dear Robin. As one who will let you talk, fight, shout, weep if you will, until all comes out for you to see clear what you want and feel."

She melted my heart! All I managed to say was, "Ah, Essie. . . ." But I could have managed to weep then without much trouble.

Instead I took another pull at the coffee and then shook my head. "I don't think it would work," I said. I was feeling regretful and must have sounded it, but also I was feeling — what's the right word? Interested? *Technically* interested. Interested in it as a problem to be solved.

"Why not work?" she demanded combatively. "Listen, Robin, I have thought this out with care. I remember all you have told me of this, and I quote you exactly: Best part of sessions, you said, came often with Sigfrid while you were on your way to see him, rehearsing what you would say, what Sigfrid would say, what you would reply."

"Did I say that?" It was always amazing to me how much Essie remembered of the idle chit-chat of a quarter of a century together.

"Said exactly," she said smugly, "so why not me? Only because I am personally involved?"

"Well, that would surely make it harder."

"The hard things do at once," she said merrily, "impossible sometimes take up to a week."

"Bless you," I said, "but —" I thought for a moment. "See, it's not just a question of listening. The big thing about a good shrink program is that it listens to the non-verbal stuff, too. Do you understand what I mean? The 'me' that does the talking doesn't always know what it wants to say. I block it — some 'I' or other blocks it, because letting all that old stuff out involves pain, and it doesn't want the pain."

"I would hold your hand through all of the pain, dear Robin."

"Of course you would. But would you understand the non-verbal stuff? That inside, silent 'me' talks in symbols. Dreams. Freudian slips. Unexplained aversions. Fears. Needs. Twitchings and blinkings. Allergies — all of those things, Essie, and a thousand more, like impotence, shortness of breath, itches, insomnia. I don't mean I suffer from all those

things —”

“Certainly not all!”

“— but they’re part of the vocabulary that Sigfrid could read. I can’t. You can’t either.”

Essie sighed. “Then must go to plan B,” she said. “Albert! Turn on lights. Come in here.”

The lights in the room came up slowly and Albert Einstein came in through the door. He didn’t exactly yawn and stretch, but he did give the impression of an elderly genius just out of the sack, ready for whatever might come but not quite fully awake yet. “Have you chartered photo-reconnaissance vessel?” she demanded.

“It is already on its way, Mrs. Broadhead,” he said.

It did not seem to me that I had quite agreed to do that, but perhaps I had, I thought. “And,” she went on, “have dispatched messages as agreed?”

“All of them, Mrs. Broadhead,” he nodded. “As you instructed. To all persons high in the military establishment or government of the United States who owe Robin a favor, asking them to use their best efforts to persuade the Pentagon people to let us interview Dolly Walthers.”

“Yes. That is as instructed,” Essie agreed, and turned to me. “So you see, is now only one way to go. Go find this Dolly. Go find this Wan. Go find Klara. Then,” she said, her voice steadfast but her expression looking suddenly much less confident and a whole lot more vulnerable, “then we see what we see, Robin, and the very best of good luck to all of us.”

She was going very much faster than I could follow, and in directions I was sure I had never agreed to. My eyes were popping with astonishment. “Essie! What’s going on? Who said? —”

“Person who said, dear Robin, was I. Is obvious. Cannot deal with Klara as ghost in subconscious. Can perhaps deal with real live Klara face to face. Only way to go, correct?”

“Essie!” I was deeply shocked. “You sent these messages? You forged my name? You —”

“Now, you wait, you Robin!” she said, deeply shocked herself. “What forgery? I signed messages ‘Broadhead.’ Is my name, correct? Have right to sign my name to message, correct?”

I stared at her, frustrated. Fondly frustrated. “Woman,” I said, “you’re too smart for me, you know that? Why do I get the idea that you knew every word of this conversation before we had it?”

She shrugged smugly. “Am information specialist, as I keep telling you, dear Robin. Know how to deal with information, especially twenty-five years of it on subject that I love dearly and want dearly to be happy. So, yes, I thought with care of what could be done and what you would permit, and reached inevitable conclusions. Would do much more than

that if necessary, Robin," she finished, getting up and stretching. "Would do whatever was best, not excluding going off by myself for six months or so so you and Klara can work things out."

And so ten minutes later, while Essie and I were getting ourselves cleaned up and dressed, Albert had received departure clearance and popped the *True Love* free of its docking pit, and we were on our way to the High Pentagon.

My dear wife Essie had many virtues. One was an altruism that sometimes took my breath away. Another was a sense of humor, and sometimes she imparted that to her programs. Albert had dressed himself for the part of daring hot pilot: leather helmet with earflaps flying, Red Baron white silk scarf thrown around his neck as he sat crouched in the pilot seat, glowering ferociously at the controls. "You can cut that out, Albert," I told him, and he turned his head and gave me a sheepish smile.

"I was only trying to amuse you," he said, removing the helmet.

"You did that, all right." And indeed I was amused. I was feeling rather good, all in all. The only way to deal with the terrible crushing depression of problems unmet is to meet them — one way or another — and this was surely a way. I appreciated my wife's loving care. I appreciated the way my beautiful new ship flew. I even appreciated the neat way the holographic Albert got rid of his holographic helmet and scarf. There was no vulgar popping out of existence. He simply rolled them up and stowed them between his feet, and I guess waited to vanish them until no one was looking. "Does flying this ship take all your attention, Albert?" I asked.

"Well, not really, Robin," he admitted. "It has full navigation programming, of course."

"So your being there is just another way of amusing me. Then amuse me in a different way, why don't you? Talk to me. Tell me some of that stuff you're always anxious to show off. You know. About cosmology, and the Heechee, and the Meaning of Everything, and God."

"If you wish, Robin," he said agreeably, "but first perhaps you would like to see this incoming message."

Essie looked up from the corner where she was going over her customer-comment synoptics as Albert wiped the big overhead screen of its star pictures and displayed:

Robinette, my boy, for the guy who made the Brazilians roll over and play dead nothing is too much. High Pentagon alerted to your visit and instructed to extend every courtesy. The joint is yours.

Manzbergen

"By God," said I, surprised and delighted, "they did it! They turned

over the data!"

Albert nodded. "So it would appear, Robin. I think you have a right to be pleased with your efforts."

Essie came over and kissed the back of my neck. "I endorse this comment," she purred. "Excellent Robin! Man of great influence."

"Aw, shucks," I said, grinning. I couldn't help grinning. If the Brazilians had turned over their search-and-locate data to the Americans, then the Americans could very probably put them together with their own data and find a way to deal with the damn spaceborne terrorists and their damn crazy-making TPT. No wonder General Manzbergen was pleased with me! I was pleased with myself. And it just went to show that when problems seemed absolutely overwhelming and you couldn't decide which to tackle first, if you just tackled one of them you would find that all the others were melting away too. . . . "What?"

"I asked if you were still interested in carrying on a conversation," Albert said wistfully.

"Why, sure. I guess so." Essie was back in her corner, but watching Albert rather than returning to her reports.

"Then if you don't mind," Albert said shyly, "it would give me pleasure to talk to you not about cosmology and eschatology and the missing mass, but about my own previous life, instead."

Essie, scowling, opened her mouth to speak, but I raised a hand. "Let him talk, love. I guess my mind wouldn't really be on the missing mass right now, anyway."

So we flew along on that short, happy run to the High Pentagon, while Albert, leaning back in the pilot seat with his hands folded over the plump tummy in the sloppy sweater, reminisced about early days in the patent office in Switzerland, and the way the queen of Belgium used to accompany his violin-playing on the piano; and meanwhile my at-third-hand friend Dolly Walthers was being questioned with great vigor by military intelligence officers in the High Pentagon; and meanwhile my not-quite-yet friend the Captain was tidying up the traces of his intervention and grieving over his lost love; and meanwhile my once-much-more-than friend Klara Moynlin was . . . was . . .

I didn't know what Klara was doing, meanwhile, not then I didn't. Actually, in detail, I surely did not really want to.

* * *

The
hardest
part



of Klara's new life was keeping her mouth shut. She had a combative nature, Klara did, and with Wan combat was all too easy to create. What Wan wanted was food, sex, company, occasional assistance at the jobs of running the spacecraft — *when* he wanted them, and not at any other times. What Klara wanted was time to think. She wanted to think about this astonishing derailment of her life. The possibility of getting killed she had always faced — if not bravely, exactly, then at least steadfastly. The possibility that so weird a misadventure as being stuck on a siding, inside a black hole, for an entire generation while the world moved on without her had never crossed her mind. That needed to be thought over.

Wan had no interest in Klara's needs. When he wanted her for something he wanted her. When he didn't, he made that very clear. It was not his sexual demands that troubled Klara. In general they were not much more trouble, or more personally significant, than the routine of going to the bathroom. Foreplay for Wan consisted of taking his pants off. The act was over at his pace, and his pace was rapid. The use of Klara's body disturbed her less than the rape of her attention.

Klara's best times were when Wan was sleeping. They did not usually last very long. Wan was a light sleeper. She would settle down for a conversation with the Dead Men, or make herself something to eat that Wan didn't particularly like, or simply sit and stare into space — a phrase that took on new meaning when the only thing one could look at that was more than an arm's-length away was the screen that looked out onto space itself. And just as she was relaxed the shrill, teasing voice would come: "Doing nothing again, Klara? What a lazy thing you are! Dolly would have baked a whole batch of brownies for me!" Or, worse, he would be in a playful mood. Then out would come the little paper-folds and drugstore vials and silver boxes of pink and purple pills. Wan had just discovered drugs. He wanted to share the experience with Klara. And sometimes, out of boredom and dejection, she would let herself be persuaded. She would not inject or sniff or swallow anything she could not positively

identify, and she rejected a lot of the things she could. But she accepted a lot, too. The rushes, the euphoria — they didn't last, but they were a blessed diversion from the emptiness of a life that had hiccupped and died, and was trying to start itself again. Getting stoned with Wan or even making love with Wan were better than trying to evade the questions that Wan asked and she did not want to answer honestly —

"Klara, do you honestly think I'll ever find my father?"

"Not a hope, Wan, the old boy's long dead." — because the old boy surely was. The man who had fathered Wan had left Gateway on a solitary mission just about the time Wan's mother began to wonder if she'd really missed her first period. The records simply posted him as missing. Of course, he *could* have been swallowed up by a black hole. He *could* still be there, frozen in time as Klara herself had been.

But the odds were very poor.

An astonishing thing to Klara — out of the million astonishing things thirty years had brought — was the easy way Wan displayed and interpreted the old Heechee navigation charts. In a good mood — almost a record, because it had lasted nearly a quarter of an hour — he had shown her the charts and marked the objects he had already visited, including her own. When the mood evaporated and he stamped off furiously to sleep, Klara had cautiously asked the Dead Men about it. It could not be said that the Dead Men really understood the charts, but the tiny bit they did know was far more than Klara's contemporaries had ever had.

Some of the cartographical conventions were simple enough — even self-evident, like Columbus's egg, once you'd been told what they meant. The Dead Men were pleased to tell Klara what they meant. The problem was to keep them from telling her *and* telling her. The colors of the objects shown? Simple, said the Dead Men; the bluer they were, the farther they were; the redder, the nearer. "That shows," whispered the most pedantic of the Dead Men, who happened to be a woman, "that shows the Heechee were aware of the Hubble-Humason Law."

"Please don't tell me what the Hubble-Humason Law is," Klara said. "What about all these other markings? The things like crosses, with little extra bars on them?"

"They're major installations," sighed the Dead Man. "Like Gateway. And Gateway Two. And the Food Factory. And —"

"And these things like check marks?"

"Wan calls them question marks." whispered the tiny voice. Indeed, they did look like that, a little, if you took the dot off the bottom of the question mark and turned the rest of it upside down. "Most of them are black holes. If you change the setting to twenty-three, eighty-four —"

"Please be still!" cried Wan, appearing disheveled and irritated from his bunk. "I cannot sleep with all this foolish yelling!"

"We weren't yelling, Wan," Klara said peaceably.

"Weren't yelling!" he yelled. "Hah!" He stomped over to the pilot seat and sat down, fists clenched on his thighs, shoulders hunched, glowering at her. "What if I want something to eat now?" he demanded.

"Do you?"

He shook his head. "Or what if I wanted to make love?"

"Do you?"

"Do I, do I! It is always an argument with you! And you are not really a very good cook and, also, in bed you are far less interesting than you claimed. Dolly was better."

Klara found she was holding her breath, and forced herself to release it slowly and silently. She could not force herself to smile.

Wan grinned, pleased to see that he had scored on her. "You remember Dolly?" he went on jovially. "That was the one you persuaded me to abandon on Gateway. There they have the rule of no pay, no breathe, and she had no money. I wonder if she is still alive."

"She's still alive," gritted Klara, hoping it was true. But Dolly would always find someone to pay her bills. "Wan?" she began, desperate to change the subject before it got worse. "What do those yellow flashes on the screen mean? The Dead Men don't seem to know."

"No one knows. If the Dead Men do not know, is it not foolish to think I would know? You are very foolish sometimes," he complained. And in the very nick of time, just as Klara was reaching the boiling point, the thin voice of the female Dead Man came again:

"Setting twenty-three, eighty-four, ninety-seven, eight, fourteen."

"What?" said Klara, startled.

"Setting twenty-three —" The voice repeated the numbers.

"What's that?" Klara asked, and Wan took it upon himself to answer. His position had not changed, but the expression on his face was different — less hostile. More strained. More fearful.

"It is a chart setting, to be sure," he said.

"Showing what?"

He looked away. "Set it and find out," he said.

It was difficult for Klara to operate the knurled wheels, for in all her previous experience such an act was tantamount to suicide: the chart-displaying function had not been learned, and a change in the settings almost invariably meant an unpredictable, and usually fatal, change in course. But all that happened was that the images on the screen flickered and whirled, and steadied to show — what? A star? Or a black hole? Whatever it was, it was bright cadmium yellow on the screen, and around it flickered no fewer than five of the upside-down question marks. "What is it?" she demanded.

Wan turned slowly to stare at it. "It is very big," he said, "and very far away: And it is where we are going now." All that combativeness was gone from his face now. Klara almost wished it were back, for what had

replaced it was naked, unrelieved fear.

And meanwhile —

Meanwhile the task of Captain and his Heechee crew was nearing the end of its first phase, though it brought no joy to any of them. Captain was still grieving for Twice. Her slim, sallow, shiny body, emptied of personality, had been disposed of. At home it would have gone to join the other refuse in the settling tanks, for the Heechee were not sentimental about cadavers. On shipboard there were no settling tanks, so it had been jettisoned into space. The part of Twice that remained was in store with the rest of the ancestral minds, and as Captain roamed about his new and unfamiliar ship he touched the pouch where she was stored from time to time without knowing that he did it.

It was not just the personal loss. Twice was their drone controller, and the cleanup job could not be done properly without her. Mongrel was doing her best, but she was not primarily an operator of slaved equipment. Captain, standing nervously over her, was not helping much. "Don't kill your thrust yet, that's no stable orbit!" he hissed, and, "I hope those people don't get motion sickness, the way you're jerking them around." Mongrel pulsed her jaw muscles but did not respond. She knew why Captain was so tense and withdrawn.

But at last he was satisfied, and tapped Mongrel on the shoulder to signify that she could discharge cargo. The great bubble lurched and revolved. A line of dark appeared from pole to pole, and it opened like a flower. Mongrel, hissing with satisfaction at last, disengaged the crumpled sailship and allowed it to slide free.

"They got a rough ride," commented the communications officer, coming over to stand beside his captain.

Captain twitched his abdomen, in the Heechee equivalent of a shrug. The sailship was quite clear of the opened sphere now, and Mongrel began to close the great hemisphere. "What about your own task, Shoe? Are the human beings still chattering?"

"More than ever, I'm afraid."

"Massed minds: Have you made any progress in translating what they're yelling about?"

"The minds are working on it." Captain nodded gloomily and reached for the eight-sided medallion clipped to the pouch between his legs. He stopped himself barely in time. The satisfaction he might gain from asking the minds how they were getting along with the translation would not justify the pain of hearing Twice among them. Sooner or later he would hear her, necessarily. Not yet.

He blew air through his nostrils and addressed Mongrel. "Button it up, power it down, let it float there. We can't do any better than that for now. Shoe! Transmit a message to them, tell them we're sorry we can't fix them

up any better right now but we'll try to come back. White-Noise! Plot all vessels in space for me."

The navigator nodded, turned to his instruments, and in a moment the screen filled with a whirling mass of yellow-tailed comets. The color of the nucleus indicated distance, the length of the tail velocity. "Which one is the fool with the corkscrew?" Captain demanded, and the screen contracted its field to show one particular comet. Captain hissed in astonishment. That particular ship, last time he looked, had been safely moored in its home system. Now it was traveling at very high velocity indeed, and had left its home far behind. "Where is he going?" he demanded.

White-Noise twitched his corded face muscles. "It'll take a minute, Captain."

"Well, do it!"

Under other circumstances, White-Noise might have taken offense at his Captain's tone. Heechee did not talk uncivilly to each other. The circumstances, however, were not to be ignored. The fact that these upstart humans were in possession of black-hole piercing equipment was terribly frightening in itself. The knowledge that they were filling the air with their loud, foolish communications was worse. Who knew what they would do next? And the death of a shipmate was the final straw, making this trip just about the worst since those long-ago days, before White-Noise had been born, when they learned of the existence of the others. . . . "It doesn't make sense," White-Noise complained. "There's nothing along their course that I can see."

Captain scowled at the cryptic graphics on the screen. Reading them was a task for a specialist, but Captain had to have a smattering of everyone's skills and he could see that along the plotted geodesic there was nothing in reasonable range. "What about that globular cluster?" he demanded.

"I don't think so, Captain. It's not directly in line of flight, and there's nothing there. Nothing at all, really, all the way to the edge of the Galaxy."

"Minds!" said a voice from behind them. Captain turned. The black-hole piercer, Burst, was standing there, and all his muscles were rippling madly. The man's fear communicated itself to Captain even before Burst said tightly:

"Extend the geodesic." White-Noise looked at him uncomprehendingly. "Extend it! Outside the Galaxy!"

The navigator started to object, then caught his meaning. His own muscles were twitching as he obeyed. The screen flickered. The fuzzed yellow line extended itself. It passed through regions where there was nothing else on the screen at all, undiluted black space, empty.

Not quite empty.

A deep blue object emerged from the darkness of the screen, paling and yellowing. It was quintuply flagged. There was a hiss from every member of the crew as it steadied, and stopped, and the fuzzy yellow geodesic reached out to touch it.

The Heechee looked at each other, and not one of them had a word to say. The one ship that could do the greatest damage one could imagine was on its way to the place where the damage was waiting to be done.



The conclusion of this story will appear in the next issue.

(The complete novel, under the title Heechee Rendezvous, will be published in May 1984 by Del Rey Books.)

The Language of Action

1.

He imbeds a thin thread in the warp of her web,
urgently presses it, coding his question.
Waiting arachnid, uncoding the wanting,
answers the asking, comes to his calling.

2.

She flies to alight in the heart of the hive,
circles it, dancing, clues the location
of honey, sweet honey, scented and waiting.
Wing to it, honeybee, yours for the taking.

3.

In the heart of the forest a ripple of red,
spread of blue pinions, looping of feathers.
Cock of the forest, lord of the courting.
Beauty bewitching the hen to the nesting.

4.

In the driveway the cycle roars to the door,
slaughters the silence, climbs to crescendo.
Knight in old Levis, boldly beguiling;
princess on pillion, smiling, smiling.

— Hope Athearn

IMPROBABLE BESTIARY: The Heisenberg

"The observation of any phenomenon automatically modifies the phenomenon."

— *Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle*

Oh, the Heisenberg's plight is peculiar, all right;
An extremely grotesque situation.
For he frequently tries to determine his size
And his colour, shape, form, and location.
But as soon as he checks his address or his sex
By conducting a brief observation
The parameters change, and the facts rearrange,
And he undergoes modification.
(If the compass should say he's in downtown L.A.,
Then he must be in Paddington Station!)

Oh, the Heisenberg's home was constructed in Rome.
(You can see it in Mexico City.)
And to get there he drives to Quebec, and arrives
In southeastern Brazil. (What a pity!)
Now it happens, by chance, that his job is in France.
(Which is why he commutes to Montana.)
But his personal jet (which he flies to Tibet)
Is a boat, and it's bound for Havana!

Oh, the Heisenberg's life is confusing: his wife
Is a blonde-haired brunette known as Karen.
But her name is Diane, so he calls her Suzanne,
And she slaps him and says: "My name's *Sharon!*"
And their afternoon meal, which appears to be veal,
Is a steak, so he finishes carving
And remarks to his mate, heaping food on her plate,
"I've been eating all day, so I'm starving."

Oh, the Heisenberg's world is confusingly twirled,
For the ice-caps are at the Equator.
And the Sun sets at noon, for it orbits the Moon.
(I'll explain all the harder parts later!)
All the Heisenberg's maps and his data collapse,
And his findings emerge badly shaken;
For as soon as he *knows* how the universe goes
Something changes, and then he's mistaken.

— F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

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